

DIALECTICAL DISCIPLESHIP: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF QUESTIONS IN
SPIRITUAL FORMATION UTILIZING A GREAT BOOKS PEDAGOGY

A THESIS-PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

MARK HOWARD MACLEAN

MAY 2019

To my University of Valley Forge students,
whose love of learning and pursuit of the Kingdom made this project possible.

Thank you.

For in His will is our peace. It is the sea to which all things existing flow,
both those His will creates and those that nature makes.

— Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso*

CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	viii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	ix
ABSTRACT	x
CHAPTER	
1. THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING	1
Introduction	1
Ministry Context: University Of Valley Forge	5
Defining The Great Books	7
Defining A Great Books Pedagogy	9
Describing How Shared Inquiry Works	9
Contrasting Shared Inquiry With Traditional Lecture Model	10
Questions: The Tools Of Shared Inquiry	11
University Approvals	13
Elective Chapels	13
Semester-Long Courses	15
Research Methodology	15
Outcomes	21
2. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS	22
Introduction	22
Defining Spiritual Formation	23
The Word	25
Prayer	27
Reflection	28

A Question of Authority: Did God Really Say...?	31
A Question of Relationship: Where Are You?	34
A Question of Faith: Is Anything Too Hard For The LORD?	37
A Question of Human Identity: What Is Your Name? [God Speaking]	39
A Question of God's Identity: What Is Your Name? [Moses speaking]	42
A Question of Eternal Destiny: Who Do You Say That I Am?	46
Summary	50
3. LITERATURE REVIEW	52
Introduction	52
The Development Of And Debate About A Western Canon	54
Specific Great Books Utilized For This Project	61
Dante's <i>Divine Comedy</i>	61
Augustine's <i>Confessions</i>	63
Thomas Aquinas' <i>Summa Theologica</i>	65
John Bunyan's <i>Pilgrim's Progress</i>	66
Plato's <i>Republic</i>	68
C.S. Lewis' <i>Screwtape Letters</i>	70
<i>The Holy Bible</i>	71
The Formation Of A Worldview In Emerging Adults	72
The Value Of The Great Books In The Life Of The Learner	77
Summary	81
4. PROJECT DESIGN	82
Introduction	82
Establishing The Great Books Settings	82

Elective Chapel Setting	83
Semester Seated Course Setting	86
Determining the Great Books Selection	87
Sample Analysis: Dante's <i>Divine Comedy</i>	88
Book Selection	92
Sample Initial Orientation And Introduction	93
Introduction to Discussion Methodology For Students	94
Round Table Discussion Samples From Elective Chapels	95
Round Table Discussion Questions And Selected Summary Samples From Seated Courses	105
Peer Analysis And Feedback	124
5. RESULTS	128
Introduction	128
Survey Research	129
Results By Question	131
Student Interviews	145
Conclusion	163
APPENDIX	
A. GREAT BOOKS OF THE WESTERN WORLD	165
B. THE HARVARD CLASSICS	171
C. ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE READING LIST	175
D. GREAT BOOKS CLASS / ELECTIVE CHAPEL SURVEY	178
E. ADDITIONAL QUESTION PROMPTS	180
BIBLIOGRAPHY	199
VITA	205

FIGURES

Figures

Figure 1: Elective Chapel Selections Sample	14
Figure 2: Survey Questions	17
Figure 3: Elective Chapel Communiqué	83
Figure 4: Classroom Setup	85
Figure 5: Survey Key	130
Figure 6: Survey Results	130

ABBREVIATIONS

EBI:	Eastern Bible Institute
FYE:	First Year Experience
MSCHE:	Middle States Commission on Higher Education
NBC:	Northeast Bible College
NBI:	Northeast Bible Institute
TGBF:	The Great Books Foundation
VFCC:	Valley Forge Christian College
UVF:	University of Valley Forge

ABSTRACT

The project was designed to analyze the potential impact of using a Great Books approach on the spiritual formation of college students at the University of Valley Forge, which is affiliated with the Assemblies of God. The role of questions in exploring classical texts to discern their usefulness for discipleship was queried. This project utilized works such as Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Augustine's *Confessions*, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, C.S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters*, Plato's *Republic*, various Church Fathers' writings, and the Bible. Students were exposed to the ongoing "Great Conversation" according to their willingness to read, reflect, and discuss the material. A positive outcome was achieved based on the collective feedback from over 250 students and several participating colleagues.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

Introduction

I am extremely grateful for the many mentors and teachers God has placed into my life at various junctures on the path of discipleship. Some spoke deep truths from Scripture which revolutionized how I saw God and His interactions with the world. Others were incredible role models as they lived truly incarnated lives in the midst of great challenges. Still others were radical encouragers through the Spirit-empowered living that allowed the promises of God to dictate their choices and outlook. The Lord continues to use their examples to quicken and stir up spiritual realities in my life in a significant way.

One individual in particular—Diogenes Allen—was used by the Lord to fuse my educational and spiritual pursuits in a manner that I had not previously explored or known.¹ His approach to teaching, as well as the content he used in his classes, birthed in me a love of learning and a love for spiritual formation that has been impossible to quench. He constantly utilized primary material in the multiple seminary courses I had with him, and he was always interested in the role of questions to draw out arguments from the texts. After taking my last class with him, I approached him and explained how deeply his courses and the materials he selected had impacted my life. I asked him if he

1. Diogenes Allen (1932-2013) was the Stuart Professor of Philosophy at Princeton Theological Seminary when I attended there as a Master of Divinity student (1994-97).

could recommend an additional reading list to me. Without hesitation, he recommended *How to Read a Book*.² At first I thought he was joking, as I was not familiar with the depth and scope of the recommended work. But after getting my hands on a copy, I began to understand why it was such a valuable book—one that would become life-changing for me. I would subsequently enroll in an additional degree program that was one hundred and seventy miles away from home.³ I commuted two days a week for two years to continue a quest birthed in and by the “Great Books.”

The atmosphere of the classes at St. John’s College was unlike anything I had previously encountered. There were no lectures; instead, there were animated discussions based on questions gleaned from the assigned classical readings from a “canon” that was rarely altered. Instead of traditional professors, classes had “tutors.” These tutors, who had earned doctoral degrees from the most esteemed schools in the country—Harvard, Yale, Stanford, Princeton, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, etc.—and would have been called “professors” anywhere else, facilitated the discussions and gave minimal personal input. However, the authors of the “Great Books” (Plato, Dante, Augustine, etc.) themselves were considered to be the true professors of our courses. The tutors’ mission was primarily to ensure that the esteemed authors of the “Great Book” would remain the instructors during class.

Perhaps the most startling difference between this program and others I had attended was the way grades were achieved. Students were not encouraged to pursue

2. Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren, *How to Read a Book: the Art of Getting a Liberal Education* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006).

3. St. John’s College, Annapolis, MD.

grades, and, in fact, no one received their grades directly. Students could inquire about them if they visited the Office of the Registrar, but doing so seemed incongruent with the educational processes and methodology of the institution. No written exams were given; oral exams took their place. Each exam took the form of an intellectual engagement between student and tutor in which the two parties would argue and contend with one another about questions the students would raise from a required text. The process was intellectually stimulating, and the only pursuit was for a deeper understanding of the text at hand. The entire exercise fueled a love and passion for learning itself, and for me, it provoked a greater love and desire to know the Truth-giver, and indeed the One who claimed to be Truth itself: “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6a ESV).⁴ The process created a sustained desire in me to see others experience a similar spiritual and educational transformation to whatever degree they desired it. My experience at St. John’s College served as a major impetus for this paper.

This project explores the role of questions in spiritual formation using the Great Books approach (also called “Shared Inquiry”) used at St. John’s College. Shared Inquiry, a method trademarked by the Great Books Foundation, invites students to engage actively with a work, asking questions of the text and dialoguing with each other in order to attain a deeper understanding of the text.⁵ To facilitate this project as a professor, I needed to establish a Great Books option at the University of Valley Forge

4. All Scripture citations are taken from the English Standard Version, 2007, unless otherwise noted.

5. “What Is Shared Inquiry?” Great Books Foundation, accessed September 1, 2014, <https://www.greatbooks.org/what-we-do/what-is-shared-inquiry/>. TGBF is “a nonprofit educational organization whose mission is to advance the critical, reflective thinking and social and civic engagement of readers of all ages through Shared Inquiry discussion of works and ideas of enduring value.”

(UVF) in two different forums. The first forum, the Elective Chapel, was designed to create an environment in which the concepts of Shared Inquiry could be introduced to students and practiced in front of a more diverse and campus-wide audience. The second forum was designed specifically so that students enrolled in semester-long courses (Theology I, II, III, Life Formation, and First Year Experience) could be part of a more in-depth Great Books experience. The courses were formulated so that students could participate in designing and implementing their own Shared Inquiry process within the classroom context.

In all of this, of course, it is important to remember that transformation in the spiritual life is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul makes a strong appeal to Roman believers to enter into this transformation:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2)

Spiritual formation is a transformative process that is initiated, empowered, and sustained by the Holy Spirit. However, though the Holy Spirit is the most essential agent of change, transformation by the renewal of the mind is a process that can be assisted by different approaches to teaching. My role as a professor at a Christian university includes being aware of these different approaches and implementing any that have the ability to enhance this dynamic formation process. My thesis-project title is *Dialectical Discipleship: Exploring the Role of Questions in Spiritual Formation Utilizing a Great Books Pedagogy*.

Ministry Context: University Of Valley Forge

The ministry context for my project is the University of Valley Forge (formerly Valley Forge Christian College), which is one of sixteen private, not-for-profit institutions affiliated with the Assemblies of God in the United States. The university had its beginning in 1939 as Eastern Bible Institute (EBI) as the result of a consolidation of several smaller schools. In 1967, EBI earned its initial accreditation from the American Association of Bible Colleges and became Northeast Bible Institute (NBI). In 1975, NBI received provisional approval from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to grant bachelor's degrees in Bible and the Institute's name was changed to Northeast Bible College (NBC). In 1976, NBC moved to the site of the former Valley Forge General Hospital in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania, and transitioned into Valley Forge Christian College (VFCC). In May 1978, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania approved VFCC's request to grant a bachelor's degree in religious education. In 2002, VFCC received its accreditation by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE). In September of 2014, the college became a University.

The university presently operates under the supervision of a Board of Trustees representing six geographical and two language districts of the Assemblies of God in the Northeast. The mission of the University of Valley Forge (UVF) is to prepare individuals for a life of service and leadership in the church and in the world. The University's vision is five-fold:

1. To promote an enthusiastically Christian campus identity and culture with special focus on Assemblies of God distinctive theology and beliefs.
2. To expand programs and enhance the quality of Pentecostal intellectual life.
3. To increase high-quality assistance, information, and support to potential and

current students.

4. To cultivate Student Life programs and services that complement the mission, enhance institutional outcomes, and provide rich experiences to develop the whole individual.
5. To enhance sustainability through creative, strategically planned growth initiatives.⁶

UVF builds in a minimum of thirty semester-hours of Bible, theology, and Christian life throughout the Core Curriculum and in its fifty majors. These degrees are offered through nine academic departments that include Arts and Sciences, Behavioral Sciences, Business, Church Ministries, Deaf Ministries, Digital Media Communications, Education, Intercultural Studies, and Music. The University offers six master's degrees in Christian Leadership (MA), Deaf Christian Leadership (MA), Digital Media (MA), Music Technology (MM), Theology (MA), and Worship Studies (MA).

As a professor at a Christian institution of higher education, one of my responsibilities is to assist students in the process of their spiritual formation. One of the ongoing challenges inherent in this task is ensuring that the content in the courses I teach is adequately grasped at the intellectual level (head/knowledge) as well as lived out at the practical level (heart/love) in one's spiritual life. The effectiveness of this process is dependent upon several factors, but two of the most significant of these include the learning styles of the students and the pedagogical approaches utilized to meet their varying learning styles.

No single teaching technique can address every learning style. There are,

6. Judy K. Dunham et al., *Valley Forge Christian College Periodic Review Report for the Middle States Commission on Higher Education* (Phoenixville, PA: VFCC, 2012), 9. The author was a member of the committee that drafted this report.

however, some approaches that may have a broader appeal than others. I have generally found that participatory methodologies that are discussion-based, in which multiple individuals wrestle with the information, tend to gain more traction in the classroom. Conversely, in the more conventional lecture-style approach, in which one person—the professor—controls the flow of information, students are generally passive receptacles for the information that is presented. Finding avenues that allow for a more sustained dialogue—above and beyond the more general “question and answer” approach—is truly challenging. But, in the context of this project, finding an alternative that works well becomes a reward in itself.

This project was created as an accessory and an alternative to the lecture-style approach to teaching. The goal is to explore the potential benefits or pitfalls of utilizing questions of a Great Books methodology in spiritual formation. Throughout this project, I set out to determine if or how the process of spiritual formation can be enhanced using a dialectical, shared inquiry approach.⁷

Defining The Great Books

The Great Books are the classical literary works that have formed and shaped Western society’s most fundamental ideas about itself and the world.⁸ In his *Invitation to the Classics*, Louis Cowan remarks on the profound significance of these classical works:

7. “What Is Shared Inquiry?” Great Books Foundation, accessed September 1, 2014, <https://www.greatbooks.org/what-we-do/what-is-shared-inquiry/>.

8. See Appendices A, B and C for three well known Great Books lists.

They have been found to enhance and elevate the consciousness of all sorts and conditions of people who study them, to lift their readers out of narrowness or provincialism into a wider vision of humanity. Further, they guard the truths of the human heart from the faddish half-truths of the day by straightening the mind and imagination and enabling their readers to judge for themselves. In a word, they lead those who will follow into a perception of the fullness and complexity of reality.⁹

Regarding spiritual formation, these works have the very real capacity to enlarge our vision—not primarily by giving us more information to process, but by bringing into focus the nature of the external world around us and the internal world within us. The Great Books provide a clearer lens to examine issues of meaning and purpose as well as enduring human concerns that affect every person regardless of time or place. They accomplish this in several ways. Cowan provides a list of seven traits and highlights as to how these Great Books stand apart:

1. The classics not only exhibit distinguished style, fine artistry, and keen intellect but create whole universes of imagination and thought.
2. They portray life as complex and many-sided, depicting both negative and positive aspects of human character in the process of discovering and testing enduring virtues.
3. They have a transforming effect on the reader's self-understanding.
4. They invite and survive frequent re-readings.
5. They adapt themselves to various times and places and provide a sense of the shared life of humanity.
6. They are considered classics by a sufficiently large number of people, establishing themselves with common readers as well as qualified authorities.
7. And, finally, their appeal endures over wide reaches of time.¹⁰

The worth and effect of reading and understanding the classics can be measured, as stated by Cowan, in *whole universes of imagination and thought*. Exploring the great questions of human character, enduring virtues, and self-understanding help the reader

9. L. Cowan and Os Guinness, *Invitation to the Classics*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 23.

10. Cowan and Guinness, *Invitation to the Classics*, 21-22.

develop an even greater desire to explore and learn. Recognizing the author's role as "teacher" can lead to intellectual and spiritual growth in students participating even in twenty-first century classrooms. Through studying the Great Books, students practice and learn important disciplines that carry over into discipleship, such as reflecting, listening, and forming coherent questions. By entering into discussion together, they can learn empathy and humility if they allow themselves to do so. Each of these important elements can be exercised and cultivated through a dialectical approach.

Defining A Great Books Pedagogy

The Shared Inquiry method is quite different from the information transfer which typically occurs from teacher (professor, expert, specialist, etc.) to student in many learning environments.

Describing How Shared Inquiry Works

Each session begins when the facilitator introduces an initial question or prompt to the students from the assigned reading of one of the Great Books. Ideally the room has been set up in advance to allow for face-to-face discussion between all the participants—for example, chairs set up in a circle or around a table so that each student can see each other student. A good question will, using the assigned text as the basis for dialogue, invite numerous responses—perhaps even some that conflict—and can be scrutinized from a myriad of perspectives.

Those involved in the discussion are encouraged to challenge, argue, critique,

defend, and raise objections so that the question receives a thorough analysis. The goal of the facilitator and the continuing challenge for the participants is to represent the thoughts of the author to the best of each participant's ability. Constant references to specific passages of the text ensure that the author's words and ideas are the focus of discussion.

In effect, the author is allowed to *speak into* the class. The initial question has run its course when several plausible answers (though some will certainly be stronger than others) or attempts at an answer have been thoroughly processed by the group. Each member of the group may have differing solutions to the question at the end of the process, but students should be able to explain (via the text) the various options. Thus, if the majority of participants have contributed in some fashion, shared inquiry has occurred.

Contrasting Shared Inquiry With Traditional Lecture Model

Generally speaking, most classrooms utilize a lecturer to impart to students a large amount of data that the students themselves could readily receive from other sources. Because of the increasing explosion of information, it is possible for students to do simple online searches and find much of the information being taught in the classroom. Students are therefore reduced to passive receptacles as the information comes forth like a river.

In contrast, the Shared Inquiry model invites students to participate more actively in the learning process. A marked shift occurs: instead of one learned expert in

the classroom, there is now a plethora of learners (led by a facilitator) who seek after knowledge and truth using a series of questions to stimulate the process. There are different kinds of questions that are beneficial to the shared inquiry process. The next section will briefly outline the scope of questions that are utilized in this methodology.

Questions: The Tools Of Shared Inquiry

There are generally three main categories of questions that sustain a shared inquiry discussion: factual questions, interpretive questions, and evaluative questions. Each type of question serves a specific purpose.

Factual Questions

Factual questions are those questions that seek to clarify the details of a passage. Participants may be asked to summarize what an author is saying at various parts of the reading. Generally speaking, factual questions can be handled without lengthy discussion if the text is referenced and the words of the author are allowed to speak to the question. Factual questions do not stimulate robust discussion because they usually have only one correct answer explained by the author. They are, however, very important in bringing clarity to opinions or interpretations that are not rooted in the text.

Contextual questions concerning the text (facts about the work) should be extremely limited. Historical questions about the author or the author's timeframe should not direct or detract from what the author has actually stated. Outside opinions

are just that, coming from beyond what everyone has access to: the author's actual words in front of them. The primary work (in translation if necessary) and words of the author should be the sole source for the discussion, unless additional Great Books and their authors are brought alongside to compare and contrast a point of view.

Interpretive Questions

Interpretive questions invite the participants to analyze what the author says along several possible paths. There are often multiple approaches to answering the question, but the best answers will have textual support from the author's own words. Thus, a close adherence to the text, while alluding to specific passages, will produce sound replies.

Interpretive questions serve the most essential role in shared inquiry as they help unlock what an author is actually trying to say. The initial question that begins a discussion and the questions that further facilitate the dialogue will be interpretive in nature. It is the leader's role to "direct traffic" with these questions to allow for a more robust discussion.

Evaluative Questions

Evaluative questions invite the participants to personalize their own experience in light of the author's own. These questions should be asked only *after* several interpretive questions have been thoroughly examined and analyzed. The responses to evaluative questions, because of their personal nature, tend to be quite subjective and

difficult to critique. Mutual experiences add to the depth of the classroom discussion and also increase the students' relationship to the work as well as its author.

University Approvals

University approvals were necessary in order to implement the project in elective chapels and classes.

Elective Chapels

After receiving permission to look for additional ways to promote the University of Valley Forge's (UVF) Honors Program,¹¹ I contacted the academic dean about the possibility of creating a platform for a Great Books experience. My goals were to help foster fellowship in UVF's Honors Program by having a regular meeting time for those in the program and to recruit additional students into the program if possible. One of the difficulties would be establishing an agreed upon, practical forum that could be assimilated into an already active university environment.

The only time when everyone's schedule would be conducive to such a trial was during the daily chapel hour.¹² Several Fridays during each semester are designated for "elective chapels." These chapel services are break-out groups around campus that gather around specific themes and topics that service a wide range of interests. The college administration agreed to allow for a Great Books format under the auspices of an elective chapel for a trial period beginning in the 2013 Fall Semester.

11. I served on the UVF Honor's Committee for the duration of the project.

12. UVF has daily chapel services during the academic year: Monday – Friday, 10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

(11/8/13)

1) Praise and Worship

Acoustic Worship with Kaitlyn Bell, Vic Davi, and Tim Weaver

Location: Flower Chapel

2) Student Preaching Chapel

Message Given By: Dontay Gibson

Worship Led By: Elicia MacTarnaghan

Location: Mason Chapel

3) Ministerial Credentialing Information Meeting

Today's Topic: Representatives from A/G Districts Answer Questions about the Credentialing Process

Location: Krempels Theater

4) Let's Talk about Sex and Sexuality

Topic: Setting and Keeping Healthy Boundaries in Relationships

Panel Discussion with Professor Kent Smith, MIR Gary Gallina, Counselor Samantha Horning, and Campus Director Wendy Beery

Location: Room 131 (Music/Choir Room)

5) Missions: Student-Led Ministries Chapel

Hosted by "Life More Abundant." The 180 Movie, Discussion about Morals and Abortion

Location: Cardone 101

6) Real Authentic Women (RAW): "Breaking Free" with Beth Moore

Hosted By: Rev. Trinidad Trancoso

Location: Cardone 106

7) Be the Man - Men Only!

Today's Topic: Break the Rule of Independence

Hosted by: Rev. Anthony Ross

Location: Cardone 201

8) Women in Ministry –Open to Women and Men

Special Guest: Rev. Margie Allen, "Lord, Why is it So Hard to Wait?"

Hosted by: Dr. Christel

Location: Cardone 204

9 Great Books Seminar: Dante's Divine Comedy

Topic: Discussion and Thoughtful Reflection on Dante's Divine Comedy, Material Provided

Hosted By: Professor MacLean and the Honors Committee

Location: Cardone 203

Figure 1: Elective Chapel Selections Sample

The UVF administration agreed to allow for a Great Books format for one of these elective chapels for a trial period beginning in the 2013 fall semester. This elective chapel was well received by the students and continued unabated from September 2013 through May of 2016 (six academic semesters).

Semester-Long Courses

As a professor in our university's Church Ministries Department, several authorizations were necessary to ensure this project could gain traction in some of the courses assigned to me. The department chair as well as the department as a whole were supportive of my project goals and agreed to allow me to modify my syllabi to accommodate these necessary changes.

A Great Books component was then added within specific courses that were conducive to including this type of approach. These courses included Theology One (*Confessions* by Augustine and selections from *The Summa Theologica* by Aquinas), Theology Two (*The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan), Theology Three (selections from the Church Fathers), Life Formation (Holy Bible), and First Year Experience (*The Republic* by Plato). Each one of these courses was modified or adapted to allow for an extended dialectical process to occur. These courses were completed over four different semesters and across the various classes (freshmen through seniors).

Research Methodology

This project provided an opportunity to evaluate a unique environment that established questions as a chief pedagogical tool in the classroom to encourage positive spiritual formation. A combination of research methodologies were utilized to test and explore the effectiveness of this approach on spiritual formation: survey research, descriptive research via selected interviews, and evaluative research comparing the elective chapels with the semester-long courses.

The most important tool for evaluating the role of questions in spiritual formation using a Great Books pedagogy was the use of the survey questions. The surveys were given at the close of each course and at the end of each series of elective chapels. The participants of the elective chapels as well as seated students in the classroom were asked a series of questions to help determine the efficacy of the role of questions using the Great Books in one's spiritual formation. Some of the questions along with an explanation of their usefulness for this project follows:

1. Did you have an understanding of / appreciation for the Great Books format when you began attending this class/elective chapel?
2. I have an understanding of / appreciation for the Great Books format after attending this class/elective chapel?
3. I see this class/elective chapel as an opportunity to be more personally involved in class discussion and/or learning?
4. I was able to learn something that I may not have learned in a traditionally-taught class.
5. I have gained a deeper understanding of the class reading materials.
6. I was able to contribute in a meaningful way.
7. Questions play a significant role in encouraging meaningful conversation.
8. I was inspired to do further discussion, reading and/or research outside of class.
9. I was able to complete the required reading.
10. My interest level changed in regards to the material due to the different style of teaching/learning.
11. Please indicate how many class meetings / elective chapels you were able to attend:
12. Where did you hear about this class/elective chapel?
13. What interested you most about attending this class/elective chapel?
14. I would be likely to attend another class/elective chapel based on the Great Books format.
15. I feel that this class/elective chapel has added significantly to my educational experience at VFCC.
16. I would recommend this Great Books class/elective chapel to other students.
17. Students who would benefit most from this Great Books class/elective chapel are:
18. I would like to receive information about future Great Books classes/elective chapels.
19. I experienced greater motivation to read the material assigned in this Great Books class/elective chapel compared to traditionally-taught classes/chapels.
20. I did more careful reflection/study for the Great Books class/elective chapel.
21. I believe that I experienced personal spiritual growth while taking this Great Books class/elective chapel.
22. I gained insight from my own personal reflection on the reading assignments/discussions that took place in the Great Books class/elective chapel.
23. My relationships with friends/family/colleagues changed during this Great Books class/elective chapel.
24. My relationship with God experienced a positive change during this Great Books class/elective chapel.
25. I am more willing to discuss other points of view after taking this Great Books class/elective chapel.
26. I thought of additional questions I wanted to ask during the Great Books class/elective chapel.
27. I have an improved sense of educational purpose after having taken this Great Books class/elective chapel.
28. I have a greater love for learning after participating in this Great Books class/elective chapel.
29. I have an increased desire to read/consider reading more challenging materials after having taken this Great Books/elective chapel.
30. The Great Books class/elective chapel is an asset to the overall VFCC learning experience.
31. I enjoyed this type of class experience.

Figure 2: Survey Questions

I initially sought to find out how many students were familiar with this approach. Many, if not most students, were originally unfamiliar with the Great Books. This ratio would

change as students who took a Great Books elective chapel would then later enroll in one of the semester-long courses I taught that also utilized them.

As a large portion of UVF students come from Pentecostal backgrounds, it was not surprising that there would be a lack of exposure to the Great Books, at least when compared with other theological traditions. For example, there has been a significant push in reformed circles to incorporate the Great Books, especially in the “Classical Christian School” movement.¹³ As a result, at the outset of each elective chapel section or semester-long course, I would briefly explain the concept behind the Great Books approach and remind the students that this approach has a long and respected history in educational circles.

I also sought to see if students were interested in opportunities to be more personally involved in an active learning environment in which class discussion would play a leading role, or if students preferred a more traditionally-taught class or learning environment. This was not meant to be an indictment on other teaching approaches, but rather to inquire if students wished to have their opportunities expanded.

I also wanted to determine if the students were able to learn something that they may not have learned in a traditionally-taught class, using questions as the essential means of growing. Could it be that they have gained a deeper understanding of the class reading materials and subsequently *been formed* and *conformed* spiritually as a result? Would the dialectical approach and the questions that were used mean that

13. See <https://classicalchristian.org/our-history/> for a brief history of the Classical Christian School movement.

students felt they could contribute in a meaningful way and that the questions themselves played a significant role in encouraging appealing discussion?

Similarly, I wanted to determine whether or not students would be apt to seek repeat experiences of this format and whether or not they would recommend the experience to their classmates and friends. My assumption was that if they took joy in their involvement in a Great Books encounter, they would freely tell their peers that they should check it out. If this took place, it would indicate a joy birthed from the sheer love of learning itself and not initiated from compulsion or obligation.

I was also curious to find out if students experienced greater motivation to read the material assigned in a Great Books encounter compared to what they exhibited in a more traditionally-taught class or chapel. Would they elect to do more careful reflection or study using this approach? Given that both reflection and study are essential components in the ongoing process of being *spiritually* formed, I felt that this was important.

Perhaps the most direct question as it relates to the overall scope of this project was asking the students if they believed that they experienced personal spiritual growth while taking a Great Books class/elective chapel. While this would be difficult to empirically substantiate, the students' honest appraisal of the question is still valuable data, or at least as valuable as a subjective response can provide. And closely related, I also asked whether the students' relationship with God experienced a positive change or not during a Great Books encounter.

As spiritual formation does not strictly occur in the classroom or library, I also

inquired whether the students' relationships with their friends, peers, or family were impacted or changed as a result of the experience. I was not certain there was a way to determine a direct correlation between these, but I wanted to explore the possibility.

Furthermore, being open to additional viewpoints and practicing the discipline of listening to others is an important element of spiritual formation, so it was important to see if students were more willing to discuss the viewpoints of others rather than to dismiss opinions out of hand without careful consideration. As a result, perhaps new questions would create a cycle of discussion that they would take to heart in order to open pathways they had not explored previously.

I also queried whether students would have an improved sense of educational purpose after having taken a Great Books class or elective chapel. Would it be possible that students could have an increased desire to read or consider reading more challenging materials after having experienced a Great Books encounter? Would their love for learning increase in other areas as a result of the experience? And did they enjoy the Great Books experience less, as much as, or more than other class or elective chapel formats?

Each of these questions provided an opportunity to test this project's hypothesis and analyze the role that questions play in spiritual formation using a Great Books approach as found in the project's title: *Dialectical Discipleship: Exploring the Role of Questions in Spiritual Formation utilizing a Great Books Pedagogy*.

I took the opportunity to survey several participants throughout the project and will be using their insights to bring further clarity on the effectiveness or non-

effectiveness of this methodology. An extended dialogue with some key contributors may yield additional data that was overlooked by the surveys.

I will also be comparing and contrasting the varying results between the elective chapel samples with the seated course samples. The elective chapels are more voluntary in nature, as students are free to come and go week-to-week. The seated courses are semester-long affairs in which students are required to participate for the duration of the course. I was curious as to what sort of impact the different learning environments would have on the various student responses.

Outcomes

A positive outcome would be to see an increased spiritual and intellectual hunger in students as a result of a direct encounter with the various Great Books using a shared inquiry approach. This methodology lends itself to pursuing a deeper love and passion for seeking the Good, the Beautiful, and the Truth, who is God Himself. It would be an added value if more opportunities for a Great Books methodology were embraced within our university environment. These could take the form of additional classes, chapels, or other additional venues on campus.

Conversely, a negative outcome would be to see a decrease in the spiritual and intellectual hunger in students as a result of a direct encounter with the various Great Books using a shared inquiry approach. Different students have different learning temperaments, so this is a distinct possibility for some (or many).

CHAPTER TWO

THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

There is always a little bit of anxiety in the air when I meet with new people and start new things. I was excited to finally begin a doctoral program that seemed to be a really good fit for my temperament and goals, but there remained a lingering nervousness as I wondered how it would all come together. As the cohort gathered and settled into their seats facing one another for the very first time, Dr. Stephen A. Macchia, one of the two mentors of the program, asked us to settle our hearts and block out any outside distractions. After a significant pause, he slowly and prayerfully read a brief sentence from the Psalter: “My soul finds rest in God alone” (Psalm 62:1a NIV).¹

Just then, a powerful peace settled over me as I strongly sensed the presence of God erasing the questions, doubts, and anxiety weighing on my heart. *God alone*, and His marvelous presence was all that was needed to bring assurance to my soul that I was exactly where the Lord wanted me to be. It wasn’t the physical place or program that ultimately mattered; finding rest in the presence of God Himself was what truly mattered. The D. Min program (*Spiritual Formation for Ministry Leaders*) was incredibly

1. Stephen A. Macchia, M. Div., D.Min., Director of the John & Lois Pierce Center for Disciple-Building, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Founder and President of Leadership Transformations, Inc.

influential and transformative mainly because of the primary role the faculty mentors gave to the Holy Trinity in all things.

This doctoral program, *Spiritual Formation for Ministry Leaders*, was structured around three core elements necessary to a healthy and fruitful spiritual life. Each of the three years highlighted one of these essentials: year one, the Word (the Word of God); year two, prayer; and year three, reflection. This chapter will briefly touch on each one of these in a general way, followed by a greater look into the area of reflection by utilizing questions in spiritual formation, which is the subject matter of this paper.

Defining Spiritual Formation

One of the first tasks of any enterprise is to define its terms. Dr. David A. Currie, the Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, provided this thorough working definition of spiritual formation for our cohort: “Spiritual formation is the lifelong, faith-filled process of the Holy Spirit transforming the whole person into the likeness of Christ to the glory of the Father as informed by the whole Word of God, in relationship with the whole people of God to fulfill the whole mission of God.”² This definition is wonderfully stated, highlighting each Person of the Trinity in the process of spiritual formation. It is *spiritual* formation, so the activity of God is paramount. No one can transform themselves; it must be done by the power of the Holy Spirit. Grace plows the way to make room for faith, which is simply responding

2. David A. Currie, M. Div., Ph. D. Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program, Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology, *Spiritual Formation for Ministry Leaders*, 1st year cohort, May, 2012.

to God's goodness and kindness as He draws people back to Himself so that they may pray back the psalmist's prayer, "My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken" (Psalm 62:12 NIV).

The fruit of this formation will flow outwards to others. Dr. Currie made this clear in the second part of his definition as above: "...in relationship with the whole people of God to fulfill the whole mission of God." Thus, the fruit we receive in communion with the Trinity is fruit that is released to be a conduit for others to receive this spiritual life as well. James C. Wilhoit, in *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, states: "Spiritual formation is at the heart of its whole purpose for existence. The church was formed to form. Our charge, given by Jesus himself, is to make disciples, baptize them, and teach these new disciples to obey his commands."³

When the main thing ceases to be the main thing, it becomes easy to replace the authentic with a counterfeit. Wilhoit's statement makes it clear that a chief purpose for spiritual formation is to create disciples who then, in turn, reproduce. In fact, a "reproducing disciple" is probably being redundant; can a person truly be a Christian disciple if he or she is not also actively reproducing or reforming the life of Christ in others through the working of the Holy Spirit? In other words, can one be considered a disciple if he or she is not also actively making disciples? Perhaps one of the reasons today's Western Church has little to no growth is because we have made biblical discipleship optional and have redefined it. We have reduced discipleship to mere

3. James Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 15.

church membership or event attendance. Some churches offer a classroom discipleship “course” that comes with a gold stamped, pastor-signed certificate if you show up 10 times and pass a classroom test. Authentic spiritual fruit will not only manifest within the life of a believer but also flow to and through the other believers the disciple is investing in, reproducing the life of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Word

The entirety of the created realm—past, present, and future—depends on the Word of God for its existence, life, and sustainability. Currie stated, “The Word is the instrument by which the Triune God gives form to creation and the Word of God gives form to re-creation.”⁴ Dr. Currie explained that the entire universe came to be in the following movement: Trinitarian Word → Creation → Recreation → Spiritual Formation. The speaker is God the Father; the Word spoken is God the Son (Logos); and the life-giving breath which goes forth is the Holy Spirit. The fullness of God is working to bring wholeness back to the entire creation.

The Scriptures, as the *written* Word of God, are always inviting us to an encounter with the *living* Word of God, Jesus Christ. Chris Webb highlights the importance of seeing and encountering Jesus in Scripture:

Jesus is at the very center of Scripture, and any authentic reading of the Bible will ultimately lead to an encounter with Christ. And it is this encounter, this meeting with God on holy ground, that is the very goal and purpose of our reading. To perceive only the text, without perceiving Christ who inhabits the text is to entirely miss the point. Our ability to

4. David Currie, “The Trinitarian Word” (lecture, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Enders Island, CT, May 21, 2012).

meet with Jesus in the pages of Scripture is far more important than any academic mastery of its contents.⁵

If Webb is correct, then much of what passes as modern Christianity would, out of necessity, be labeled as a sham. Walking into any bookstore, or flipping through the “Christian” programming on television, one is quickly faced with the sad reality that if Jesus is mentioned at all, he is generally portrayed as some form of cosmic Santa Claus or sugar daddy, not as the Holy One who is worthy to be praised, regardless of what one receives out of the exchange.

To encounter God is to be undone, to be radically confronted with one’s own shortcomings and left without excuse. Many today would rather be comforted by “stuff” than by His Presence, all the while ignoring an authentic, life-changing encounter. But to see Scripture primarily as a self-help guide or to hitchhike on another’s faith because of his or her title is to entirely miss the point. If only the essence of this one quote were received, embraced, and lived out, it would put an end to many of the Christian self-help books, gurus, and ministries that feast upon God’s people. Instead, each reading of Scripture should be a spiritual feast for us, for the Scriptures are replete with the very presence of Jesus, the very Word of God and Bread of Life. Feasting upon Jesus in Scripture allows us to say with the Psalmist “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him” (Psalm 34:8).

The church, as a living organism, should be pulsating with this reality. Dr. Macchia asked our cohort a very penetrating question to see if this really is the case in

5. Chris Webb, *The Fire of the Word* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2011), chap. 11, Kindle.

our places of worship. He asked, “Is Scripture permeating the life of the church or merely punctuating it?”⁶ If Scripture becomes a program or is somehow diminished in the life of the community, then the church will be full of activity and noise but lack the voice and power of God. Dr. Currie stated something similar when he said, regarding Eve’s conversation with the serpent in the garden, “We become malformed when we detach ourselves from God’s Word ... and Satan ‘re-forms’ God’s Words.”⁷

Prayer

Because the Word is living and contains the very voice of the Lord, to engage in these words, whether to hear with the heart or respond in humble obedience, is to pray. Scripture leads us to prayer, for it is more than just ink on a page. Dr. Currie provided this definition for prayer: “Attentive, authentic, loving, trusting orientation of the whole person to the divine, flowing out of and into the Triune Godhead’s own eternal interpersonal communion.”⁸ This means that every encounter with the Scriptures can be an encounter with the Living Word. Humility and gratitude are essential for this encounter, however. Marva Dawn states,

It is important to stress that we must stand under his Word in order truly to understand it, for if we open the Scriptures in order to pick them apart or to elevate our own learning above the message proclaimed therein, we will not hear what the Spirit is saying to us. Only with humility and gratitude can we approach the table of God’s Word to feast there on his eternal love. Unfortunately, such a caution has to be issued in this book

6. Stephen A. Macchia, “Scripture and the Church” (lecture, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Enders Island, CT, 5/22/12).

7. David Currie, “The Trinitarian Word” (lecture, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Enders Island, CT, 5/21/12).

8. David Currie, “Prayer” (lecture, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA, 5/27/13).

because the spirit of our times often elevates one's own biblical exegetical skills over the biblical witness itself.⁹

The posture of one's heart in approaching the Scriptures is no small thing. In fact, it may very well be the most important thing, along with the Holy Spirit's promise to illumine the text to our spirits. The Apostle Paul states the importance of this to the Church at Corinth: "The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:14 NIV).

The Spirit of God, the same One who inspired the original authors, can deliver life through the text only to a humble heart willing to be taught. Human interpretive grids, methodologies, and various "isms" (feminism, redaction criticism, rhetorical criticism, etc.) can bring some understanding, but they don't have the ability to transform; only the Holy Spirit can accomplish an authentic change and empower a person to live out that change as one who has been converted.

Reflection

Another way the Holy Spirit delivers life is through the role of reflection. This is an essential component of spiritual formation and an important element of this project. One pathway that highlights the important place of reflection is in the utilization of questions. The remaining parts of this chapter will explore the theological and biblical foundations for the potential usefulness of the role of questions in spiritual formation.

9. Marva J. Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 157-8.

Questions in and of themselves will not bring spiritual transformation, but they can offer an inviting pathway for reflection that assists with the process. Within the word “question” is embedded the word *quest*, signifying the searching for something of value or importance that has yet to be fully attained. The role of *questions* in Scripture often invites one on a spiritual “quest,” as one reflects on and carefully considers those inquiries. How one chooses to respond to questions can provide an opportunity for spiritual stirring and additional self-revelation, as well as a deeper understanding of the Revealer of all things.

Scriptural questions can actually assist or hinder a believer during the process of spiritual formation, depending on how one receives and responds to the questions. Most new students are quick to offer opinions and give answers without carefully hearing, considering, and understanding the nature or depth of questions being pondered. This can have disastrous consequences for spiritual formation. Questions help to cultivate and exercise one’s spiritual ears and heart through the practice of empathic listening, which is itself an act of love. Dietrich Bonhoeffer emphasizes this importance for Christians:

The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them. Just as love for God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them. It is God’s love for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear. So it is His work that we do for our brother when we learn to listen to him. Christians, especially ministers, so often think they must always contribute something when they are in the company of others, that this is the one service they have to render. They forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking.¹⁰

10. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 97-8.

Humility is cultivated and embraced when listening is highlighted and questions are prudently discussed and deliberated. When one ignores the process of thoughtful reflection, one becomes a partner of foolishness. Solomon has wisely stated, “If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame” (Proverbs 18:13). Thus, the process of developing one’s spiritual hearing becomes crucial in the role of spiritual formation.

There is power and wisdom in asking the right kinds of questions. Questions are foundational to the act of learning, and they provide a solid basis for the study of multiple disciplines, including theology, philosophy, education, and also the concept of spiritual formation.

Questions allow us to ponder, study, research, postulate, evaluate, think deeply, apply wisdom to our thinking and actions, learn new concepts, and advance in our knowledge of reality, ethics and spiritual formation. Questions—and how we respond to them—are absolutely foundational to living a Christ-centered life. The quest of humankind to find truth, the nature of God, the meaning of life, our purpose here on earth and how to fulfill it all start with important questions. The significance of the role of questions in the Bible¹¹ and the impact throughout the history of theology¹² as it relates to spiritual formation is truly remarkable.

11. The earliest Hebrew and Greek manuscripts lack an accurate way to definitively discern punctuation, so scholars disagree on the precise number of questions in the Bible. However, most scholars will agree that the number surpasses 3,000. Jimmie Hancock’s work, *All the Questions in the Bible*, using the KJV lists 3,298, lulu.com, accessed July, 2011.

12. Many famous works across several theological traditions center their learning around questions, including: The Roman Catholic *Summa Theologica* by Thomas Aquinas, the Lutheran *Smaller and Larger Catechism* by Martin Luther, and the Reformed *Heidelberg Catechism*, as well as the *Westminster Catechism*.

The greatest book of all the Great Books is the Holy Bible. By nearly any measurement, whether copies owned or sold, cultural impact upon the arts, or personal testimonies of transformed lives, the divinely inspired Scriptures reign supreme. What are some of the examples in the Bible that make this thesis, exploring the role of questions in spiritual formation, important? This chapter will explore some of these questions and provide a theological and Biblical framework for exploring some of the most significant questions and their role in spiritual formation.

A Question of Authority: Did God Really Say...?

The issue of authority in spiritual formation is of paramount importance. If one wishes to be formed into the image of Jesus Christ, then it must be the voice of the Lord that is heard, discerned, and followed. There are many voices and opinions that make themselves available, but it is the Lord's voice and those in alignment with Him that tune the heart toward heaven. Contrary voices, like contrary winds, will create resistance in the journey and cause tension in the heart. The interplay between Eve and the serpent, discerning God's voice in the midst of the serpent's question, is one believers struggle with on a daily basis. The Bible states, "Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" (Genesis 3:1 NIV).

In view of spiritual formation, the *very first question* posed in Scripture presents the reader with a number of essential themes to consider. The first is the reality of a

perpetual enemy that is manifested in the serpent. The identity of the serpent, while often contested, has traditionally been understood to either be Satan or a serpent influenced by Satan (Revelation 12:9, 20:2). This assumes the reality of spiritual warfare and an enemy who would contend against God and His stated purposes.

Next, the word of God is being presented in a manner that challenges the character and nature of God. Here, the voice of the enemy attempts to frame previous statements made by God as restrictive in nature, thereby questioning God's authority. The command was clearly given: "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die'" (Genesis 2:16-17). The serpent's question creates doubts in Eve's mind concerning the goodness of God and the truthfulness of His word. The question is posed in an altered manner, and the serpent appears to be implying that God was holding back from Eve by not allowing her to eat from whatever tree she wanted. In limiting Eve's choices, her freedom was supposedly being infringed upon, and as such, her ability to live fully was supposedly being affected.

Another assumption latent in the serpent's questioning is that the Word of God is somehow subject to Eve's judgment, as well as ours, and not the other way around. "Did God really say..." becomes an abiding question with which believers everywhere must wrestle on a daily basis. Will we choose to live under the Lord's authority, or find reasons why the Word of the Lord doesn't apply to us or our situations? John Calvin offers some helpful insight here:

Very dangerous is the temptation, when it is suggested to us, that God is not to be obeyed except so far as the reason of his command is apparent. The true rule of obedience is, that we being content with a bare command, should persuade ourselves that whatever he enjoins is just and right. But whosoever desires to be wise beyond measure, him will Satan, seeing he has cast off all reverence for God, immediately precipitate into open rebellion.¹³

Reason and faith are often pitted together as opposites. But a rightly reasoned faith that trusts in the word of God is a foundation upon which believers can stand. Faith and trust in the “bare command” of God leads to an enlarged heart and a life of true freedom in which the heart is set at liberty, not a more restricted life as implied by the serpent.¹⁴

So where does that leave one when pondering questions concerning the Word of the Lord? Is the believer free to ask questions concerning those things that God has stated? Is the very nature of asking questions to be disregarded as a “lack of faith” and a step into spiritual de-formation rather than formation? Questions in and of themselves are not evil, but the posture of the heart and the spirit in which questions are asked should be considered. Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s words bring some clarity to the motivations behind the serpent’s question to Eve:

What is the real evil in this question? It is not that a question as such is asked. It is that this question already contains the wrong answer. It is that with this question the basic attitude of the creature toward the Creator comes under attack. It requires humankind to sit in judgment on God’s word instead of simply listening to it and doing it. And this is achieved by proposing that, on the basis of an idea, a principle, or some prior knowledge about God, humankind should now pass judgment on the concrete word of God.¹⁵

13. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, trans. John King, (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2005), vol. I, Genesis 3:1-24, accessed June 17, 2017, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01.ix.i.html>.

14. The more literal ESV renders Psalm 119:32 as “I will run in the way of your commandments when you *enlarge my heart!*”, while the NIV renders the same verse as “I run in the path of your commands, for you have *set my heart free*” (italicized for emphasis).

15. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 108.

The spiritual condition and attitude of the one asking questions will sometimes reveal even more than the content of the question ever could. By asking his question in such a deceitful manner, the serpent reveals his true motivation and attitude. He makes the human being question themselves, their judgment, *and* God. When one places their personal judgment over the revealed word of the Lord, spiritual deconstruction and death are sure to follow. Thought by thought, if one is not careful, leads one to place their own thoughts above God's.

Questions generally will have to be sifted for their motivations as well as for their content. When considering the role of questions for the purpose of spiritual formation, it is important to discern if there is an ulterior motive behind the words being asked.

How the believer wrestles with the question, "Did God actually say...?" will have a profound impact upon spiritual formation and the quest to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. If one does not properly discern the voice of the Lord from the voice of the enemy, the opinions of others will take precedence over God's transforming voice and spiritual formation will be severely crippled and cut off at the source of life.

A Question of Relationship: Where Are You?

When God's voice is minimized, neglected, or rejected, the consequences for spiritual formation are as severe as they are deadly. This next question is presented in the context of Adam and Eve having succumbed to the serpent's deceiving misrepresentation of God's voice. Not holding firm to what God had previously spoken leads Adam and Eve (and, through them, the entire human race) into a fractured and

broken relationship with their Creator. Instead of being in a place in which spiritual formation could continue to thrive, they now experience spiritual de-formation, which is also known as spiritual death, for fellowship with the Father has been broken. Genesis 3:9 states, “But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, ‘Where are you?’”

This, the very first question in scripture *spoken by the Lord*, is instructive from several angles. As the omniscient God, He knows and is aware of all things, including the spatial locations and whereabouts of everything He has created. So why would the Lord even ask a question concerning the things to which He would presumably already have an answer? If this initial question is not one concerning geography, then what are the question’s other implications?

The Lord is not seeking Adam’s physical location; the Lord is inquiring about his spiritual and relational state apart from Him. Where there was once rich, sweet fellowship between Adam and God, now there is a painful new reality: death. This death is multidimensional, as it has both physical and spiritual components. Theologian Norman Geisler states,

Death is separation from God, and spiritual death is spiritual separation from God. Isaiah said, ‘Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear’ (Isaiah 59:2). The instant Adam sinned, he experienced spiritual isolation from God; this is evidenced by his shame and his hiding from his Creator.¹⁶

The physical death was gradual, but the spiritual death was immediate. Adam and Eve, in choosing the voice of the serpent over the sure word of God, were radically separated

16. Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Three: Sin, Salvation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Bethany House Publishers, 2004), 123.

from their loving relationship with the Father. There has been movement, but the movement has been from the safety and security of the felt Presence of the Lord to the fear and dread of His wrath. God remains as He always is, was, and will be, but not so for Adam.

The consequences of Adam's disobedience were steep and sudden, making the Lord's question to him that much more significant. The ramifications of this one question speak to the importance of listening carefully to that which is being asked, for God's questions bear the weight and authority of the Judge of the universe. The church father John Chrysostom, in one of his homilies on Genesis, supposes that included in God's question to Adam are several layers of other imbedded important questions:

How did this happen to you? Who has brought you to this changed condition? What kind of robber and brigand has robbed you like this in an instant of all the substance of your wealth and cast you into such indigence? Whence has come the nakedness you are experiencing? Who is responsible for depriving you of that wonderful garment you had the good fortune to wear? What is this sudden transformation? What tempest has all at once in this way sunk all your precious cargo? What has happened to make you try to hide yourself from the one who has been so kind to you and placed you in a position of such importance? Who is it you are now endeavoring to avoid through fear? Surely, after all, no one has cause to accuse you? Surely, after all, no witnesses are testifying against you? Whence comes the fear and dread that overwhelms you?¹⁷

Here Chrysostom's quote illustrates a key point: questions have the capacity to evoke subsequent questions. Chrysostom's inclusion of a plethora of additional questions enlarges the scope of the consideration of God's initial question to Adam, "Where are you?" These additional questions can play a significant role in spiritual formation, which

17. John Chrysostom, "Homilies on Genesis 1–17," in *The Fathers of the Church, Volume 74*, ed. Robert C. Hill, (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 227-8.

occurs as one takes the time to meditate, ponder, and reflect on the relevance of one's relationship with the LORD. These added questions invite the reader to go beyond the literal meaning of the first question and dig for substance in additional embedded questions that are implied in the asking of "Where are you?"

A Question of Faith: Is Anything Too Hard For The LORD?

The next essential question that greatly impacts spiritual formation concerns the issue of faith, or trusting in the promises of the Lord. How long should one wait when God makes a promise? What if all the prevailing circumstances are manifesting evidence contrary to God's promise? Surely God understands a lack of faith or trust in such conditions? The Lord, appearing to Abraham, says, "Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son" (Genesis 18:14).

This question would at first glance appear to be rhetorical in nature, *for of course* the Lord is the omnipotent God—strong, mighty, and all-powerful. To be sure, the question serves a rhetorical purpose, but it is also crucial to process the question from a perspective of faith, or the lack thereof. One well-known example would be how Abraham and Sarah waited for God's promise to be fulfilled for nearly twenty-five years. The promise, known as the Abrahamic Covenant, is first listed in Genesis 12:1-3:

Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'

Sarah was sixty-five years old and her womb had already been closed when the promise was first given to Abraham (Abram). Now with the added years and additional frailty of her body, the promise probably seemed like a distant memory. The voice of the Lord was no longer something that was perceivable by faith. By reason of her circumstances and the chronological distance from the promise, all Sarah could do was laugh at the idea that the promise would be accomplished through her womb. In the natural, physical realm, this seemed not even improbable, but indeed absolutely impossible.

Believers throughout the centuries have also been in circumstances in which the promises of God seem unlikely to be fulfilled. Yet, there is a reason why believers are called “believers.” They believe *in spite of* the natural circumstances that would stand in the way of God’s voice of promise. This faith responds to the question “is anything too hard for the LORD?” with a ready “no” even in the midst of overwhelming obstacles.

John Calvin in his *Commentary on Genesis*, remarks:

For there is no little weight in this sentence, 'Can anything be wonderful with God?' But the angel chides Sarah, because she limited the power of God within the bounds of her own sense. An antithesis is therefore implied between the immense power of God, and the contracted measure which Sarah imagined to herself, through her carnal reason. Some translate the word *pala* hidden, as if the angel meant that nothing was hidden from God: but the sense is different; namely, that the power of God ought not to be estimated by human reason.¹⁸

This “antithesis” that Calvin mentions is at work in many of the characters found in Scripture. The interplay between either receiving the promise of God by faith or allowing the circumstances of life to dictate a response will also be a significant

18. Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*, Genesis 18:1-33, accessed June 17, 2017, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01.xxiv.i.html>.

determining factor in one's spiritual formation. It is not as if faith is void of the knowledge of the circumstances or denies their reality; it simply rests in the faithfulness of the Lord of the promise. Calvin elsewhere in his writings speaks of this knowledge grasped by faith in his famous definition found in the *Institutes*: "Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit."¹⁹ Faith-knowledge, which according to Calvin is both firm and certain, is not grounded primarily in the circumstances as they appear to *only* the physical senses. To fully process the question made to Sarah, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?," one needs the knowledge of "God's benevolence" toward us. To truly encounter and experience this love is more than a cognitive knowing. It is a confident trust in the faithfulness and goodness of the One making the promise, regardless of the perceived delay. This question, which invites the believer to truly be a *believer*, looks beyond the circumstances to embrace the promises made by the LORD. The benefit is a deeper, more personalized faith by which spiritual formation is positively enhanced.

A Question of Human Identity: What Is Your Name? [God Speaking]

This question comes at the end of a very unique wrestling match between a divine visitor and the patriarch Jacob. Believers know they are called to wage warfare as an important part of their spiritual formation. Wrestling against principalities and

19. John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1974), 685.

powers from the enemy's realm is a given, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12 NKJV). But what about wrestling against the *good guys*? How does this serve in one's spiritual formation? Could it be that it is extremely difficult to be honest with one's own identity? Is it possible that void of a divine encounter, one may truly never personally own who they really are? Genesis 32:27-28 states, "And he said to him, 'What is your name?' And he said, 'Jacob.' Then he said, 'Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.'"

Jacob was returning home after twenty years. He was rightly anxious to meet his brother Esau after such a time, for Jacob had cheated and stolen from Esau the two most precious things that belonged to him: his birthright and his blessing (Genesis 25:33, 27:27-40). In fact, this should not be overly surprising given that Jacob's name in Hebrew means *heel-grasper, one who supplants*, and, by implication, *cheater* or *deceiver*. This fact was not hidden to Esau who lamented the irony involved in Jacob's name (Genesis 27:36).

So the question posed to Jacob during this peculiar wrestling match, "What is your name?" really goes to the heart of Jacob's essence, beyond asking for just his superficial identity. It would appear that, like the questions addressed above, this "simple" question has layers of meaning. Jacob had deceived others his entire life—even cheating from Esau, his own brother, to secure that which did not rightly belong to him. On this occasion, however, Jacob could no longer deceive himself into a blessing. He

would receive a blessing, but this time it would come by a different set of rules. Brian Howell aptly notes: “Though he had always been a cheat, he finally played by God’s rules in seeking a blessing, and came out a victor. Jacob may not have prevailed over God in an ultimate sense, but his single-minded pursuit of blessing has now prevailed *upon Him*.”²⁰

In spiritual formation, honesty and authenticity are qualities necessary for making progress in the spiritual life. To not know who we truly are, and to habitually practice falsehood and deceit as *natural* and *normal* as our own names, will create a perpetual and even tortuous restlessness in our souls (Psalm 18:25-26). Is it any wonder that, like Jacob, who was restless and anxious as he prepared to meet his brother, we are very often anxious in our relationships with our neighbors, and with the Lord Himself? Derek Kidner provides an insightful observation into the real relationship dynamics at work during Jacob’s divine encounter:

The conflict brought to a head the battling and groping of a lifetime, and Jacob’s desperate embrace vividly expressed his ambivalent attitude to God, of love and enmity, defiance and dependence. It was against him, not Esau or Laban, that he had been pitting his strength, as he now discovered; yet the initiative had been God’s, as it was this night, to chasten his pride and challenge his tenacity. ‘With the cunning thou dost wrestle’. The crippling and the naming show that God’s ends were still the same: He would have all of Jacob’s will to win, to attain and obtain, yet purged of self-sufficiency and redirected to the proper object of man’s love, God himself.²¹

A believer’s true identity can be known and affirmed only when it is carefully and honestly considered. The truly wonderful news is that change is indeed possible. This

20. Brian Howell, “God’s White Flag: Interpreting an Anthropomorphic Metaphor in Genesis 3,” *Southeastern Theological Review* vol. 01, no. 01, Winter 2010, 42.

21. Derek Kidner, *Genesis: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, (Chicago, IL: Tyndale Press, 1967), 180.

brings great hope and encouragement to those on the journey. If we are willing to honestly respond to the question, “Who are you?,” the LORD can begin to shape us and give us a new identity that will allow the power of the Holy Spirit to bring tremendous transformation and revelation into the spiritual formation process.

A Question of God’s Identity: What Is Your Name? [Moses Speaking]

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”²² If A.W. Tozer is correct, then the implications of this question by Moses to God are of the utmost importance for spiritual formation. The majority of Bible translations in English have historically diminished the nuances of the names of God in Scripture. While certainly not intentional, a generic understanding of “God” leads to a belief in not much of a god at all. In fact, “God” is not a personal name, and using it can lead one to an impersonal relationship instead of rich fellowship with the One who invites us into intimacy with Himself. Exodus 3:13 states, “Then Moses said to God, ‘If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ What shall I say to them?’”

As a result of the memorable “burning bush” encounter with the LORD, Moses’ life is radically redirected. Throughout his dialogue with the LORD, it is clear that God recognizes something in Moses that Moses does *not* recognize (Exodus 2:1-3:17). God welcomes Moses’ questions and each divine response gives him more revelation into the nature and character of God. This question in particular, “What is his name? What

22. A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1961), 1.

shall I say to them?," seems completely legitimate given the strangeness of the revelation Moses receives. He is being asked—at eighty years old—by a *talking bush* to return to the most powerful nation in the world, where he is a known fugitive, to demand release of a (slave) workforce of at least 600,000 men, plus women and children (Exodus 12:37).

Few people will ever be chosen for such a monumental task, but without knowing Who God truly is or longing to know Him better, believers risk finding themselves stuck in a wilderness without knowing their purpose. This specific question concerning God's identity is crucial for Moses and for all believers as well. Our concept of God, rightly or wrongly, will have a great effect on every area of our spiritual lives. In asking the question, however, one must be prepared for the divine response. Tozer's observation is an important insight to guard against the thinking that one can easily "grasp" God's divine nature. He cautions:

When we try to imagine what God is like we must of necessity use that-which-is-not-God as the raw material for our minds to work on; hence whatever we visualize God to be, He is not, for we have constructed our image out of that which He has made and what He has made is not God. If we insist upon trying to imagine Him, we end with an idol, made not with hands but with thoughts; and an idol of the mind is as offensive to God as an idol of the hand. ... Left to ourselves we tend immediately to reduce God to manageable terms. We want to get Him where we can use Him, or at least know where He is when we need Him. We want a God we can in some measure control. We need the feeling of security that comes from knowing what God is like, and what He is like is of course a composite of all the religious pictures we have seen, all the best people we have known or heard about, and all the sublime ideas we have entertained.²³

23. Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, 8.

The response Moses receives from the LORD asking God to reveal his name is absolutely revelatory: “God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ God also said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers--the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob--has sent me to you. This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.’”(Exodus 3:14-15).

The noted biblical scholar Brevard Childs has rightly stated that “Few verses in the entire Old Testament have evoked such heated controversy and such widely divergent interpretations.”²⁴ While diverse opinions abound, there can be no doubt that God’s response is unlike anything Moses had ever heard before. By responding in such a manner, the LORD reveals that He is unlike anything or anyone else. By answering as the “I AM WHO I AM,” God is indicating that He does not exist as something else in the existing universe. He is EXISTENCE ITSELF.²⁵

This startling revelation, and all that it implies, speaks to both God’s incomprehensibility and His mystery. It is an essential reminder to all that God is not something or someone to be figured out or defined according to human measurement, but rather He is the One to be worshiped, revered, and adored.

This question posed by Moses reaffirms the reality that God will not be limited or described by definitions of a previously derived set of assumptions. Moses most likely

24. Brevard Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1974), 19.

25. Created things have differentiated essences. With God, being and essence are one, as God’s essence is existence itself, which all created things must partake of, to “be.” Thomas Aquinas’ work, *On Being and Essence*, is most helpful here.

wanted a “name” so that he could readily describe this God to others. What he receives instead is a revelation of the One who Jews to this day will not mention by name in case it would cause an offense to YHWH.²⁶ The awesomeness of the nature and name of God will always be shrouded in the deepest mystery, as finite beings will never be able to fully grasp the infinite. St. Augustine wrestles with this mystery as he poses these numerous questions to God:

How shall I call upon my God, my God and my Lord, when by the very act of calling upon him I would be calling him into myself? Is there any place within me into which my God might come? How should the God who made heaven and earth come into me? Is there any room in me for you, Lord my God? Even heaven and earth, which you have made and in which you have made me – can even they contain you? Since nothing that exists would exist without you, does it follow that whatever exists does in some way contain you? But if this is so, how can I, who am one of those existing things, ask you to come into me, when I would not exist at all unless you were already in me?...To what place can I invite you, then, since I am in you? Or where could you come from, in order to come into me?²⁷

These profound questions serve as a stark reminder that the LORD is unlike anything or anyone else. The Infinite One has no limits or boundaries to contain or confine him.²⁸ He is not merely information to be defined and mentally processed, He is One to be encountered, embraced, and loved, and He reciprocates this love back to and through us, transforming our spiritual lives. As we embrace and are embraced into the wonder of God’s name and nature, we open up the wonderful opportunity for dynamic growth in our spiritual formation.

26. “The pronunciation of the written Name was used only by the priests in the Temple when blessing the people (Numbers 6:22-27); outside the Temple they used the title “Adonai.” Jewish Encyclopedia, s.v. “Names of God,” accessed July 7, 2017, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/11305-names-of-god>.

27. St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, (New York: New City Press, 1997), 40.

28. In Latin, *in* (no) serves to negate *finis* (limit); thus, infinite means “to be unlimited or boundless.”

A Question of Eternal Destiny: Who Do You Say That I Am?

Jesus asked many questions. Jesus's first recorded words in the New Testament took the form of a question: "And he said to them, 'Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?'" (Luke 2:49). Jesus later praised the disciples for asking questions and seeking further clarification concerning his parables. He made a clear distinction between those who hear and think they understand and those who truly perceive the things of the Kingdom. In fact, it is those who ask the questions and perceive who find the secret of the Kingdom:

And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. And he said to them, 'To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, so that 'they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.' (Mark 4:10-12)

Of all the questions that Jesus asked, perhaps the ones with the most personal significance for everyone, occurred at Caesarea Philippi: "Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?'" (Matthew 16:13-15).

Toward the end of Jesus's earthly ministry, he traveled well into Gentile territory to ask his disciples what others—and what they themselves—thought of His identity. Jesus's question to them did not mean he was looking for information about Himself; rather, He was offering them an opportunity to examine their own thoughts in light of the opinions of others. John MacArthur writes:

It was not that Jesus was unaware of what the people were saying about Him but that He wanted the Twelve to think carefully about those popular perceptions. He was not concerned about the opinions of the unbelieving and hypocritical scribes and Pharisees, some of whom had even accused Him of being in league with Satan (Matt. 10:25; 12:24). He was rather asking about the thoughts of those who looked on Him positively, although uncertainly and who recognized Him to be more than an ordinary religious leader. After hearing His teaching and witnessing His miracles, what was their final verdict about Jesus, the Son of Man?²⁹

It is important to remember that though the opinions about Jesus and His identity that come from others can be of some assistance, these opinions can also lead one astray on the path of spiritual formation. Some hold opinions that may have a kernel of truth, such as those who opined that Jesus was associated with the prophets. Surely this is true, but it is incomplete. This is not the only or even the first time Jesus is called a prophet in the New Testament Gospels. When Jesus is dialoging with the woman at the well in Samaria, she calls Him a prophet after He tells her things about herself that He would have had no earthly way of knowing; He does not dispute the fact with her, even though He is much more than simply a “prophet” (John 4:3-29).

Even when confessing Jesus as the Christ or the Messiah, one may have an incomplete grasp of what is being professed. D.A. Carson observes,

What we must recognize is that Christological confession was not cut and dried, black or white. It was possible to address Jesus with some messianic title without complete conviction, or while still holding some major misconceptions about the nature of his messiahship, and therefore stopping short of unqualified allegiance or outright confession.³⁰

29. John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Matthew 16-23*, (Georgetown, TX: Lifeway Christian Resources, 2015), accessed Jun 18, 2017, WordSearch Bible Software.

30. D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 365.

What is needed for a full confession is more than man can give or offer. When Christ asks the disciples who they say He is, Peter replies, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 16:16-17). Peter’s grand confession that Jesus is the Christ is true because he has had divine assistance in reaching this conclusion via grace and revelation. Short of this, no true confession is possible.

Spiritual *formation* cannot happen without the Holy Spirit’s work doing the *forming*. Without the Holy Spirit to bring revelation, no true or proper identification of Jesus as the Christ can be made, nor can true confession be expressed. We would be left to the realm of the mere opinion of men. No matter how wise or educated one is in the religious realm, without revelation he or she is left in the camp of the High Priest, who angrily utters this confession back to Jesus, but is left tormented by Jesus’s response:

And the high priest stood up and said, ‘Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?’ But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, ‘I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.’ Then the high priest tore his robes and said, ‘He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy.’ (Matthew 26:62-65)

The question is on the High Priest’s lips, and the Answer is standing right before him.

Yet, flesh and blood did not or could not discern the proper answer. David Turner notes how ironic this caustic demand is:

The high priest’s demand that Jesus identify himself (Matt. 26:63) reiterates the main themes of Peter’s confession. If Peter’s faithful confession is the Christological high point of the Gospel, the high priest’s angry question is

certainly the low point. The expression ‘the living God’ implicitly distinguishes between the true God of Israel and the false pagan gods.³¹

For such a destiny-altering question, it is essential that we rightly identify Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. How one responds ultimately determines whether eternal life is granted or not, for only Christ Himself is the authority over life and death. The church father Cyril of Alexandria, highlighting the power in Jesus, Son of the Living God, states:

Peter did not say ‘you are a Christ’ or ‘a son of God’ but ‘Christ, the Son of God.’ For there are many christs by grace, who have attained the rank of adoption [as sons], but [there is] only one who is by nature the Son of God. Thus, using the definite article, he said, the Christ, the Son of God. And in calling him Son of the living God, Peter indicates that Christ himself is life and that death has no authority over him. And even if the flesh, for a short while, was weak and died, nevertheless it rose again, since the Word, who indwelt it, could not be held under the bonds of death.³²

Owning this question, “Who do you say that I am?” and the necessary answer that follows is the most crucial of all the questions and answers one will ever face. Spiritual life and subsequent formation is determined by confessing and believing in Jesus as the Christ, the Resurrected and Living One. This is not simply a mere verbal act on our part, for when declared with faith (and the aid of grace), spiritual life is imparted, and a new creation is birthed. We are no longer simply living in and by the flesh; God’s Trinitarian life comes to us and live within us. The Apostle Paul in the Book of Romans describes this wonderful new Spirit-filled power:

31. David Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2008), 404.

32. Thomas C. Oden, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* Matthew 14-28, New Testament vol. 1B, (Georgetown, TX: Lifeway Christian Resources, 2015), Wordsearch Bible Software.

You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. (Romans 8:9-11)

Summary

This chapter explored the theological importance and roles of Scripture, prayer, and reflection in spiritual formation. This chapter also highlighted several significant questions in Scripture to evaluate the theological and Biblical foundations for the potential usefulness of the role of questions in spiritual formation. While there are many additional questions that could be explored, these questions were selected to survey the feasibility of utilizing questions in spiritual formation. Initially, “A Question of Authority” looked at the implications of the serpent’s question, “Did God really say..?” and emphasized the importance of hearing and heeding God’s voice above all others.

Next, “A Question of Relationship” examined God’s question to Adam after eating the forbidden fruit, “Adam, where are you?” This highlighted the severe consequences of a broken relationship with God. Then “A Question of the Role of Faith” in a believer’s life was discussed with the question, “Is anything too hard for the LORD?” Following this, “A Question of Human Identity” was asked by the wrestling angel to Jacob: “What is your name?” to see if the “Deceiver” would own up to his nature so that he could receive a new name and a change of identity. Another “Question of Identity” follows, but this time from Moses to God: “What is your name?” The response and importance of the answer, “I AM” was deliberated. The final question, this time spoken

by Jesus, “Who do you say that I am?” is the most significant of all, for it is a question that will ultimately probe and discern one’s *eternal destiny*.

Scripture itself provides testimony after testimony of the importance of asking questions and seeking answers. Both the Old and New Testaments stand witness to the benefit of carefully deliberating and reflecting on important spiritual issues raised through asking questions. Jesus himself consistently asked questions to clarify important truths and engage people. He invited many to wrestle with issues pertaining to spiritual formation—from fisherman to High Priest and even to Caesar. His enduring words of invitation and promise to those who inquire are still filled with power today: “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened” (Matthew 7:7-8).

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter will provide a literature review of the various components of this project. First, I will provide an overview of several significant sources and ideas by authors who are part of the ongoing conversation regarding the history and validity of the Great Books and its perceived canon. Next, I will highlight the significance of the specific Great Books that were utilized as part of this project. The developing formation of the worldview of emerging adults also needs to be considered, since my work on this project deals primarily with college students. Finally, I will conclude with some additional thoughts on the importance of the Great Books for the learner.

Why should the Great Books matter to the modern person? Is the content relevant for spiritual formation? Who determines what books are “great?” Can they have any formative affect upon the mind, soul and spirit? Aren’t they just full of dated and antiquated ideas from a bunch of “dead white men?”¹ What is there to glean or learn from using these works as source material? These are some of the questions that are commonly raised when discussing the educational, pedagogical, and formative value of the Great Books.

1. Upon the well-known Great Books propagator Mortimer Adler’s passing, Sabrina Walters noted in her *Chicago Sun-Times* article “Great Books Won Adler Fame, Scorn” July 1, 2001, that “Critics for years poked holes in Adler’s famous list of the Great Books of the Western World, which included no African-American or Hispanic writers and only a handful of women.”
https://web.archive.org/web/20071104001606/http://calbears.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4155/is_20010701/ai_n13916438, accessed July 20, 2017.

While various criteria exist to determine the viability of utilizing the Great Books, it is difficult to deny the works' ability and capacity to imprint upon the mind and heart memorable images, ideas, characters, and themes that transcend time, space, epoch, and geography. Italo Calvino states, "The classics are books that exert a peculiar influence, both when they refuse to be eradicated from the mind and when they conceal themselves in the folds of memory, camouflaging themselves as the collective or individual unconscious."²

These works are truly foundational in the sense that they contain unforgettable images that are carried into what is called the "Great Conversation," which is the continual process of authors responding to and building on the great works by authors of the past. Robert Hutchins, in his unapologetic apology for the Great Books, states,

Until lately the West has regarded it as self-evident that the road to education lay through great books. No man was educated unless he was acquainted with the masterpieces of his tradition. There never was very much doubt in anybody's mind about which the masterpieces were. They were the books that had endured and that the common voice of mankind called the finest creations, in writing, of the Western mind.³

Similarly, C.S. Lewis takes note of the lasting, pervasive power of these works in a review found in the *Oxford Magazine*: "[A great book] lays its images permanently on the mind [and] is entirely irreplaceable in the sense that no other book whatever comes anywhere near reminding you of it or being even a momentary substitute for it."⁴

2. Italo Calvino, "Why Read the Classics?" *New York Review of Books*, NYREV, Inc., trans. Patrick Creagh October 9, 1986, www.nybooks.com/articles/1986/10/09/why-read-the-classics/, accessed July 20, 2017.

3. Robert Maynard Hutchins, *The Great Conversation*, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1977, blogs.britannica.com/wp-content/pdf/The_Great_Conversation.pdf, accessed July 20, 2017.

4. C. S. Lewis, introduction to *Realms of Gold: The Classics in Christian Perspective* by Leland Ryken, (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1991), 2.

The Development Of And Debate About A Western Canon

Although the classics have been read and taught as long as there have been books, libraries, teachers, and schools, the Great Books as an academic movement did not begin until 1920 at Columbia University. In a course of study called “General Honors” facilitated by John Erskine (as well as additional “tutors”), the students worked through selected Western classics in a dialectical fashion. They were encouraged to engage directly with the authors of the classics rather than sit through lectures about the specific books. Erskine believed that studying the Great Books

could best be done in a class that would not be taught in the ordinary sense by an instructor but would consist of a conversation among the students over which the instructor would merely preside—asking questions, helping the talk along, disentangling it when necessary, but in no sense serving as an authority on the work being considered.⁵

This General Honors course at Columbia University set in motion a Great Books movement that has had several iterations through numerous college and university honors programs, as well as entire college curriculums designated for a Great Books approach.⁶

Not everyone was a willing disciple, however. There continue to be numerous critics and naysayers who believe such an approach inculcates a dominant cultural viewpoint that serves only to suppress those who are not white or culturally “Western”.

Alex Beam, in documenting the Great Books movement states,

5. John Van Doren, “The Beginnings of the Great Books Movement at Columbia,” in “The Core Curriculum: Van Doren, Erskine, and the Great Books Legacy” in *Living Legacies at Columbia*, ed. Wm. Theodore De Bary, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 504.

6. St. John’s College in Annapolis, MD, re-engineered itself in 1937 as it pioneered this approach with an exclusive curriculum of Great Books. The author attended the school as a graduate student and received a M.A. in Liberal Arts in 2002. See <https://www.sjc.edu/>.

The culture wars of the 1980s effectively buried the Great Books in a blizzard of anti-Establishment, multicultural rhetoric. The academy turned against the dead white males whose busts adorned the friezes atop university libraries, and the defenders of the classical tradition—the best-selling Chicago philosopher Bloom and the octogenarian Adler—did themselves few favors in the struggle for the American mind.⁷

In cryptically referencing Allan Bloom’s significant work *The Closing of the American Mind*, Beam signifies the importance of Bloom’s penetrating critique of the liberal establishment’s attack on the classical works of the West. Bloom’s concern was that the emphasis and morphing of modern education away from objective values such as goodness and truth would leave students lacking the ability to think critically. He writes, “The end result is that there can be no more truth or goodness and no need or even ability to make tough choices. Where the purpose of higher education once was to enable the student to find truth, the modern university teaches that there is no truth, only ‘lifestyle.’”⁸

There is an additional danger involved when one untethers these enduring values in the educational enterprise: one’s “vision” becomes narrow and stunted. Bloom continues, “The failure to read good books both enfeebles the vision and strengthens our most fatal tendency—the belief that the here and now is all there is.”⁹ The Great Books, rather than limiting one’s viewpoint, actually serve to open up additional vistas in the mind, heart, and soul that would be impossible to find solely in one time period or context.

7. Alex Beam, *A Great Idea at the Time: the Rise, Fall, and Curious Afterlife of the Great Books*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2008), 192.

8. Allan David Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 62.

9. Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 64.

C.S. Lewis clearly understood how the classics could serve as a corrective to a parochial vantage point. He writes,

Every age has its own outlook. It is specially good at seeing certain truths and specially liable to make certain mistakes. We all, therefore, need the books that will correct the characteristic mistakes of our own period. And that means the old books. All contemporary writers share to some extent the contemporary outlook—even those, like myself, who seem most opposed to it. Nothing strikes me more when I read the controversies of past ages than the fact that both sides were usually assuming without question a good deal which we should now absolutely deny. They thought that they were as completely opposed as two sides could be, but in fact they were all the time secretly united—united with each other and against earlier and later ages—by a great mass of common assumptions. We may be sure that the characteristic blindness of the twentieth century—the blindness about which posterity will ask, ‘But how could they have thought that?’—lies where we have never suspected it, and concerns something about which there is untroubled agreement between Hitler and President Roosevelt or between Mr. H. G. Wells and Karl Barth. None of us can fully escape this blindness, but we shall certainly increase it, and weaken our guard against it, if we read only modern books. Where they are true they will give us truths which we half knew already. Where they are false they will aggravate the error with which we are already dangerously ill. The only palliative is to keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds, and this can be done only by reading old books.¹⁰

Lewis went on to suggest that a reader should regularly read and intellectually digest the best classical works and read more modern works only in light of these. Only in this way could one be free from the prejudice bound to be created by living in any specific age, past or present.

But how can one identify those works which are worthy to be read by each and every ensuing generation? Can a literary canon be established or agreed upon that will allow a Great Conversation to be passed down through succeeding generations? By

10. C.S. Lewis, introduction to *On the Incarnation: De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*, by Athanasius, new ed., (New York: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1996), 4.

whose or what authority will these lists be identified, promoted, and studied?¹¹ Arnold Krupat frames how competing sides define the perceived parameters of authority when compiling a literary canon. While not comprehensive in scope, it provides the reader with a working understanding of each group's starting point. First, he describes the concept of a literary canon from those who advocate for the Great Books in an affirmative light:

The concept of a literary canon is generally understood in either of two ways, each very much opposed to the other. Let me state them in their most extreme form: on the one hand, the canon is conceived of as a body of texts having the authority of perennial classics. These texts, 'the great books' (as at least one American college has institutionalized them in a course of instruction), are, as they always have been and always will be, nothing less than the very best that has been thought and said. To understand their content—to have isolated for further meditation their themes or ideas—is to gain or make some nearer approach to timeless wisdom; to apprehend their form is to experience the beautiful or at the least to perceive a significant order. Sympathetic contact with these texts cannot help but make one a better person, or—the phrase is a curious one on inspection, to be sure—more human.¹²

Others, however, are not so charitable when considering the concept of a canon.

Considering the various tensions often inherent in a particular social order, some perceive these texts as contributing to the exasperation of those being culturally subjected by a more dominant class. Krupat continues:

On the other hand, however, the canon is taken simply as the name for that body of texts which best performs in the sphere of culture the work of legitimating the prevailing social order: canonical texts are, as they always have been, the most useful for such a purpose (although the modality of their usefulness may, of course, alter with time). To understand their content is largely to accept the world view of the socially dominant class; to apprehend

11. See three well known lists of the Great Books in Appendix A, B and C.

12. Arnold Krupat, *The Voice in the Margin: Native American Literature and the Canon*, Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1989, 22, <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft2g5004sk/>, accessed November 1, 2017.

their form is to fail to perceive that acceptance as such. Sympathetic contact with these texts tends mostly—although not always or exclusively—to contribute to that ideological conditioning, the production of that consciousness, necessary to conform one willingly to one’s—usually subordinate—class position in society.¹³

Author and film critic David Denby, upon his return to the Columbia program after a twenty-five year hiatus, was in a unique position to observe and evaluate the resistance of many in the academy to these classical, perennial texts. He states,

It is absurd to speak, as does the academic left, of classic Western texts dominating and silencing everyone but a ruling elite or white males. The vast majority of white students do not know the intellectual tradition that is allegedly theirs any better than black or brown ones do. They have not read its books, and when they do read them, they may respond well, but they will not respond in the way that the academic left supposes. For there is only one ‘hegemonic discourse’ in the lives of American undergraduates, and that is the mass media. Most high schools can’t begin to compete against a torrent of imagery and sound that makes every moment but the present seem quaint, bloodless, or dead.¹⁴

Denby critiques the assumption that somehow the Great Books have provided the majority of white students’ cultural privileges because of their content. From the midst of the Ivy League school at which the Great Books movement began, his observation is that neither white students nor those from other ethnic backgrounds are cognizant or fluent in the thoughts and ideas found in the “classic Western texts.”

Allen Bloom echoes Denby’s observation that not everyone, and clearly not the majority of any culture, truly desires or captures the crux of what is offered through the great authors and ideas of the past. It has always been but a select few who have the longing for the objective values that have endured throughout the generations. They are

13. Krupat, *The Voice in the Margin*, 23.

14. David Denby, *Great Books: My Adventures with Homer, Rousseau, Woolf, and Other Indestructible Writers of the Western World*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 459.

a unique community among any community, and have never had the strength in numbers or popularity that critics assume. Bloom surmises:

The real community of man, in the midst of all the self-contradictory simulacra of community, is the community of those who seek the truth, of the potential knowers ... of all men to the extent they desire to know. But in fact, this includes only a few, the true friends, as Plato was to Aristotle at the very moment they were disagreeing about the nature of the good. ... They were absolutely one soul as they looked at the problem. This, according to Plato, is the only real friendship, the only real common good. It is here that the contact people so desperately seek is to be found. ... This is the meaning of the riddle of the improbable philosopher-kings. They have a true community that is exemplary for all other communities.¹⁵

Harold Bloom, author of *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*, states the importance of a literary canon; it is not to be used for the purpose of perpetuating the ideas of those in power but to provide a genuine encounter between strangers that will create a shared experience of “aesthetic dignity.” H. Bloom observes: “The Western Canon does not exist in order to augment preexisting societal elites. It is there to be read by you and by strangers, so that you and those you will never meet can encounter authentic aesthetic power and the authority of what Baudelaire (and Erich Auerbach after him) called ‘aesthetic dignity.’”¹⁶

Great works of literature have not only the ability to inspire intellectually but also the capacity to evoke and stir within us something beyond ourselves. What Baudelaire and Auerbach defined as “aesthetic dignity,” Richard Rorty described as being “swept off your feet,” as the inspiration from these classics acts like a muse,

15. Bloom, *Closing of the American Mind*, 381-382.

16. Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1994), 36.

working itself into the person in an unreflective way to bring powerful stimulation. He states,

If it is to have inspirational value, a work must be allowed to recontextualize much of what you previously thought you knew; it cannot, at least at first, be itself recontextualized by what you already believe. Just as you cannot be swept off your feet by another human being at the same time that you recognize him or her as a good specimen of a certain type, so you cannot simultaneously be inspired by a work and be knowing about it. Later on—when first love has been replaced by marriage—you may acquire the ability to be both at once. But the really good marriages, the inspired marriages, are those which began in wild, unreflective infatuation.¹⁷

Ironically, it could be argued that the entire enterprise of assessing these works and the intellectual heritage that emerges from the study of the Great Books actually had its origins in, and *emerged* from them. When compared with non-Western societies, Hanson and Heath observe that critiquing the literary canon of the West is a ‘red herring’:

Critics of the dominance of Western literature now most often direct their venom against the so-called literary canon, arguing for a more inclusive menu of assigned readings for college students—unusual genres of the written, spoken, and visual media from women and people of color outside of the European experience. For the most part, their attack on a stagnant, rigid conception of Great Books is a red herring. Europeans and Americans have pioneered the study, appreciation, and preservation of the history, art, and literature of other cultures—interest in the historical tradition of ‘outsiders’ is relatively weak in most non-Western societies.¹⁸

17. Richard Rorty, “On the Inspirational Value of Great Works of Literature,” in *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 125.

18. Victor Davis Hanson and Jon Heath, *Who Killed Homer? The Demise of Classical Education and the Recovery of Greek Wisdom*, (New York: Encounter Books, 2001), 125.

Specific Great Books Utilized For This Project

This next section will highlight the specific Great Books that were utilized in the elective chapels and semester-wide courses during the duration of this project. While it is not within the scope of this project to do a thorough summary or overview of each individual work used, it is this author's aim that the continuing significance of each work can be presented. The critics of the Great Books would like to dim the relevance and importance of these works, as well as the Great Conversation they continue to arouse and promote. However, among the reasons for the resilience and strength of the Great Books is their ability to continually awaken and evoke elements of the Great Conversation across generations and cultures.

Dante's *Divine Comedy*

It would be difficult to find a greater literary achievement than Dante's *Divine Comedy*.¹⁹ Whether considering the grand scope of its content or its vast cultural influence (today's modern Italian derives from Dante's vernacular as a result of the work), there are few works (if any), that could rival its influence.²⁰ Fabian Alfie, a professor in the University of Arizona department of French and Italian, recently commented on Dante's enduring influence in an interview with La Monica Everett Haynes:

19. The original title was *La Comedia di Dante Alighieri* (Tuscan) in the 1472 edition. By 1555, the title was changed to include "Divine": *La Divina Comedia di Dante*.

20. Edmund Gardner, "Dante Alighieri" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Co., 1908), vol. 4: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04628a.htm>, accessed November 10, 2017: "The power of the sacred poem in popularizing Catholic theology and Catholic philosophy, and rendering it acceptable, or at least intelligible to non-Catholics, is at the present day almost incalculable."

When you have an actor like Tom Hanks starring in a movie adapted from best-selling novelist Dan Brown, you're bound to get more questions about Dante than usual. But interest in Dante has never waned in the 700 years since he died. There is an unbroken tradition of Dante's influence in Western culture since the 14th century. Dante has never stopped being popular because his poem deals with questions that are always relevant.²¹

The power of a poet's imagination can be weighed by the quality of critics it inspires and challenges. By this criteria, Dante has certainly been a standard-bearer in bringing to light the power of "poetic imagination." David Lummus comments:

From Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Osip Mandelstam in the early twentieth century to Seamus Heaney, W. S. Merwin, and Robert Pinsky at century's end, modern poets of every bent have been drawn to the *Inferno* and to the other two canticles of the *Comedy* as an example of poetry's world-creating power and of a single poet's transcendence of his own spiritual, existential, and political exile. To them Dante was and is an example of how a poet can engage with the world and reform it, not just represent it, through the power of the poetic imagination.²²

Furthermore, poets aren't the only ones to acknowledge the power of Dante's symbols. Many theologians have claimed Dante as an ally as well. Paul Tillich says,

The greatest poetic expression of the Existentialist point of view in the Middle Ages is Dante's *Divina Commedia*. It remains, like the religious psychology of the monastics, within the framework of scholastic ontology. But within these limits it enters the deepest places of human destruction and despair as well as the highest places of courage and salvation, and gives in poetic symbols an all-embracing existential doctrine of man.²³

Dante's work also greatly influenced the artistic brilliance that was manifested throughout the writings of C.S. Lewis:

Understanding the relationship between Lewis's fiction and Dante's poem is important because, although it is no secret that Lewis's imagination was shaped

21. La Monica Everett-Haynes. "Why Dante's 'Inferno' Stays Relevant After 700 Years," *Futurity* November 17, 2016: <http://www.futurity.org/dante-divine-comedy-hell-1299902-2/>, accessed November 10, 2017.

22. David Lummus. "Dante's Inferno: Critical Reception and Influence" in *Critical Insights: Inferno*, Patrick Hunt, (Pasadena, CA: Salem Press, 2011), 63.

23. Paul Tillich, forward to *Dante's Commedia: Theology as Poetry*, eds. Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne, (Notre Dame, ID: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 310.

by the medieval and Renaissance literature he loved so much, his appreciation and understanding of Dante provide a major key to the shape of that literary imagination. The links between his fiction and Dante's poem demonstrate Lewis's lifelong belief that the modern age has much to learn from the past – in this case, from an author in the distant past whose story, characters, literary techniques, and Christian worldview are still relevant today. They demonstrate Lewis's consummate artistry in the variety of ways he adapts features from that poem. They shed light on Lewis's meaning in all his novels, since the spiritual truths he teaches are the same as Dante's, illustrating that certain basic Christian themes transcend time, culture, and denominations.²⁴

Daigle-Williamson's insightful quote illustrates the continuing capacity and power of a Great Book to traverse generations and cultures and to inspire greatness in others—in this case the indomitable Christian voice of C.S. Lewis. For those who would advocate quieting the voices of the past, it should be noted that one conceivable result of doing so may be to quench or negate powerful voices of the future.

Augustine's Confessions

The brilliance and significance of St. Augustine can be seen in the acknowledgment that his influence on shaping Christianity is perhaps second only to that of the great Apostle Paul. Peter Kreeft states,

Every person now living would be very different, or would not be at all, if Augustine had been different, or had not been. No Christian in history since the apostle Paul has had more influence. Almost singlehandedly, Augustine forged the medieval Christian mind. Since the Reformation, he is the only extra-biblical writer whom both Roman Catholics and Protestant Reformers have loved, appealed to, and claimed as their own.²⁵

24. Marsha Daigle-Williamson, introduction to *Reflecting the Eternal: Dante's Divine Comedy in the Novels of C.S. Lewis* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2015), 3.

25. Peter Kreeft, "The Influence of Saint Augustine." In *The Great Books Reader*, ed. John Mark Reynolds, (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2011), 121.

Regarding the Protestant Reformation, it has been argued that it was, in fact, a civil war between two Augustinian doctrines: his doctrine of grace versus his doctrine of the church. B.B. Warfield states, “The problem which Augustine bequeathed to the Church for solution, the Church required a thousand years to solve. But even so, it is Augustine who gave us the Reformation. For the Reformation, inwardly considered, was just the ultimate triumph of Augustine's doctrine of grace over Augustine's doctrine of the Church.”²⁶

The immensity of Augustine’s literary output is well-established, as was his work as a theologian and a shepherd. Robert Dodaro comments,

For many centuries, from the Middle Ages to the present, Augustine has remained the most prominent and most widely studied author in western Christianity, second only to biblical writers such as Paul. The roots of this extraordinary phenomenon go back to Augustine’s own lifetime, and are in part due to the fact that he did not produce the most immense literary corpus of all western Christianity for solely ‘academic’ purposes. Already, a good number of his contemporaries considered him to be both the most accomplished theologian and the most trustworthy pastor of their times.²⁷

When considering Augustine’s wide-ranging influence, perhaps the key element to note is how relatable and inviting his theological approach remains. His chief work towards this end remains his *Confessions*, a powerful autobiographical work detailing his personal spiritual journey. Gail Kienitz states,

By any one of a number of standards the *Confessions* of Augustine is a classic. It is generally considered the first full-scale autobiography of the ancient world and one of the most influential spiritual autobiographies of all time. As a devotional text, the *Confessions* also confirms Augustine’s place as one of the greatest

26. Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, ed. Samuel G. Craig, (Whitefish, MT: Literary Licensing, 2011), 321-322.

27. Robert Dodaro, and George Lawless, eds., *Augustine and his Critics*, (London: Routledge/Taylor and Francis Group, 1999), 17.

thinkers of the Christian church. His extensive writings influenced the development of both medieval theology and the Protestant Reformation. The *Confessions*, however, is not simply one man's story. As readers throughout the centuries have noted, it is the story of everyone who has journeyed from worldliness, ambition, and despair to salvation and joy by the grace of God.²⁸

Thus, while this journey is uniquely Augustine's, the testimony and witness of his life is readily relatable to all spiritual seekers of any and every age. A present day earnest reader in New York can glean much of the same wisdom and spiritual insight as a reader in Rome circa 450 A.D.

Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*

The indefatigable and insightful St. Thomas Aquinas brought a stark clarity and logic to Christian Theology that is still greatly admired, respected, and studied. His influence can be marked in a number of different ways. Peter Kreeft mentions at least seven of these for consideration:

St. Thomas is important for us today precisely because of our lack. Timeless truth is always timely, of course, but some aspects of truth are especially needed at some times, and it seems that our times badly need seven Thomistic syntheses: (1) of faith and reason, (2) of the Biblical and the classical, the Judeo-Christian and the Greco-Roman heritages, (3) of the ideals of clarity and profundity, (4) of common sense and technical sophistication, (5) of theory and practice, (6) of an understanding, intuitive vision and a demanding, accurate logic, and (7) of the one and the many, a cosmic unity or 'big picture' and carefully sorted out distinctions. I think it is a safe judgment that no one in the entire history of human thought has ever succeeded better than St. Thomas in making not just one but all seven of these marriages which are essential to mental health and happiness.²⁹

28. Gail Kienitz "Augustine: The Confessions," in *Invitation to the Classics*, eds. Louise Cowan and Os Guinness, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 81.

29. Peter Kreeft, "On Saint Thomas," introduction to *Summa of the Summa*, (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1990), 13-14.

These seven syntheses are refreshing for their candidness in a culture that has seemingly lost its way. Harkening back to the profundity of St. Thomas is a jolt for both the head and the heart, but he also provides a path forward, standing on the solid foundation of truth.

Flannery O'Connor was a well-known lover of the thoughts of St. Thomas and has fondly shared her regard for the *Summa's* impact upon her life:

I couldn't make any judgment on the *Summa*, except to say this: I read it every night before I go to bed. If my mother were to come in during this process and say, 'Turn off that light. It's late,' I with a lifted finger and broad bland beatific expression, would reply, 'On the contrary, I answer that the light, being eternal and limitless, cannot be turned off. Shut your eyes,' or some such thing. In any case I feel I can personally guarantee that St. Thomas loved God because for the life of me I cannot help loving St. Thomas.³⁰

While the anecdotal nature of this quote may appear trite, the example O'Connor gives is one that many others through the centuries have likewise experienced in a similar manner. While today there are many who would seek to destroy foundational principles, concepts, and values, St. Thomas advocates for a better way. His *Summa* continues to point others to God's goodness, love, and truth.

John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*

The enduring legacy and influence of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* can be seen in multiple ways, including its vast readership since it was first published in 1678. It

30. Flannery O'Connor, *The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor*, ed. Sally Fitzgerald, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988), 93-94.

is reported that no other book (with the exception of the Bible) has been translated into more languages, and it was a reading staple of nearly every home in colonial America:

The Pilgrim's Progress was destined to become one of England's greatest literary works. Proving its timeless appeal, it has been translated into more languages than any other book except the Bible—nearly two hundred—and it is second only to the Bible in all-time circulation. A copy was present in almost every home in England and in early America. The simple tinker-preacher who refused to be silenced had now gained a universal audience. Maintaining popularity as a classic for over three hundred years, The Pilgrim's Progress has touched the hearts and minds of millions and has placed John Bunyan among the literary immortals.³¹

Even though the book is allegorical in nature, it was recently judged, according to a 2013 poll by the influential British publication *The Guardian*, to be the greatest novel in the English language:

The Pilgrim's Progress is the ultimate English classic, a book that has been continuously in print, from its first publication to the present day, in an extraordinary number of editions. There's no book in English, apart from the Bible, to equal Bunyan's masterpiece for the range of its readership, or its influence on writers as diverse as William Thackeray, Charlotte Bronte, Mark Twain, CS Lewis, John Steinbeck and even Enid Blyton.³²

Although Bunyan was self-taught (as he did not attend the schools of his day), his genius could not be dismissed by those who were more formally trained. Literary stalwarts of the highest caliber, such as William Blake and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, were deeply affected by the brilliance of Bunyan:

If Bunyan was an unlettered tinker out of Bedford, his allegory must be the untutored work of one who was truly a 'natural' genius; his pilgrim, after all, had power enough to affect the businesses and bosoms of all sorts and conditions of men. William Blake was sufficiently moved by Christian's adventures to create his twenty-nine incomparable water-color illustrations, while Samuel Taylor

31. Cheryl Ford, preface to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, by John Bunyan, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1991), xiii.

32. Robert McCrum, "The 100 Best Novels: No 1 – The Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan (1678)." *The Guardian* September 23, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/sep/23/100-best-novels-pilgrims-progress>, accessed October 05, 2017.

Coleridge thought the allegory ‘the best Summa Theologiae Evangelicae ever produced by a writer not miraculously inspired.’³³

These complimentary words by Coleridge underscore the continued power of Bunyan’s allegorical *pilgrim* to inspire, challenge, and encourage the believer’s *progress* along life’s journey. The ability to capture hearts regardless of the century or setting clearly marks this work as a Great Book.

Plato’s *Republic*

When considering Plato’s *Republic* as a Great Book, one of the challenges that is made abundantly clear is the manifold interpretive possibilities opened up to the reader. This is a distinct hallmark of a Great Book, as it will invite many additional re-readings with potential supplementary discoveries, regardless of one’s starting point.

Philip Allott explains:

The first wonder of the book is that it is open to an infinite number of possible interpretations. Such is the dialectical nature of the timeless conversation that is philosophy. Each generation has understood Plato in its own way—from the Stoic philosophers and the early Christian theologians, through the Arab scholars and the Renaissance humanists and the Cambridge Platonists, to Rousseau and Kant and Hegel and Marx and Schopenhauer. Immanuel Kant expressed his warm admiration for Plato. But he said, charmingly and truly, that it may be that we understand Plato better than Plato understood himself. Plato is ‘Plato’.³⁴

The capacity of the *Republic* to address the issue of “the good life,” regardless of the audience, continues to astonish readers well over two-thousand years since it was

33. James F. Forrest, "The Pilgrim's Progress: A Dream That Endures." *Christian History | Learn the History of Christianity & the Church*, no date, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-11/pilgrims-progress-dream-that-endures.html>, accessed October 10, 2017.

34. Philip Allott, “On First Understanding Plato’s *Republic*” in *European Journal of International Law*, vol. 22, Issue 4, November 1, 2011, 1165–1173, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ejil/chr085>, accessed November 1, 2017.

written. It has the ability to speak to experts and beginners alike, in no small part due to Plato's "artistic brilliance," as Stanley Rosen keenly states:

Plato's *Republic* is one of those works in the history of philosophy that is both excessively familiar and inexhaustibly mysterious. It has been studied endlessly by a wide range of readers, specialists and amateurs alike, and has become a canonical document of Western civilization. No one would expect to find Hegel's *Science of Logic* or Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* as the text in a Great Books discussion group or even as required reading in an undergraduate humanities course. But the *Republic* is at home in both settings, or, if not quite at home, certainly not entirely out of place. It addresses the most important question that a human being can raise: What is the good life? And, despite the presence of occasional technical passages, the dialogue is composed in such a way as to seem to speak directly to a wide audience of intelligent and serious persons who exhibit a philosophical spirit but are not necessarily philosophical adepts. There can be little doubt that the wide appeal of the *Republic* is largely due to its artistic brilliance.³⁵

Plato's literary corpus and influence are immense according to nearly any standard, but his *Republic* remains supreme for its ability to synthesize much of his previous work. Its scope and magnitude address and encompass many disciplines:

Plato's text has more than lived up to its author's aims: the *Republic* has proven to be of astounding influence and importance, setting down in a very real sense the central agenda of the Western philosophical enterprise—and everyday undergraduate education as well—up to the present moment. Although other Platonic texts supersede the *Republic* in some aspect or other (for example, the challenging argumentation of the *Parmenides* and *Theaetetus*) it nevertheless brings together all of Plato's prior work, ranging over everything from moral psychology, philosophy of education, aesthetics, and comparative political science to epistemology and suprasensible metaphysics—unifying them into a comprehensive vision that is at once theological, philosophical, political, and moral. The *Republic*, then, is justly celebrated as Plato's central text, and scholars continue to regard it as Plato's magnum opus. It remains a basic text in Western education in a variety of disciplines (in particular, philosophy, psychology, political science, classics, religious studies, education, and history)—from high

35. Stanley Rosen. *Plato's Republic: A Study*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 1.

school through graduate education—and continues to attract the attention of the very best scholars in a variety of disciplines.³⁶

The *Republic's* continuing relevance to students of many disciplines displays the tremendous value of this Great Book. As such a foundational text, it is one by which nearly all non-sacred texts are measured.

C.S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters*

The creative genius of C.S. Lewis is a marvel to the young and old alike. He possessed an intelligence that allowed him to convey the subtleties and truth of Christianity in a manner equivalent to many artistic literary prodigies of old. Reformed theologian and teacher R.C. Sproul explains:

His work showed a marriage of art and science, a marriage of reason and creative imagination that was unparalleled. His gift of creative writing was matched by few of his twentieth-century contemporaries. He was indeed a literary genius in which he was able to express profound Christian truth through art, in a manner similar to that conveyed by Bach in his music and Rembrandt in his painting. Even today his introductory book on the Christian faith—*Mere Christianity*—remains a perennial best seller.³⁷

Sarah Pulliam also comments,

Lewis has been dubbed an 'evangelical rock star' by The New York Times, but as the New Yorker noted, both mainline Protestants and Catholics also lay claim to him. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia invoked Lewis' *Screwtape Letters* in an interview with New York Magazine, and U2 front man Bono named him in an interview with Focus on the Family.³⁸

36. Mark L. McPherran, introduction to *Plato's 'Republic': A Critical Guide*, ed. Mark L. McPherran, (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1.

37. R.C. Sproul, "The Weight of Glory: The Significance of C.S. Lewis," *Tabletalk Magazine* January 1, 2008, <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/weight-glory/>, accessed October 10, 2017.

38. Sarah Pulliam Bailey, "C.S. Lewis Still Inspires 50 Years After His Death," *Religion News Service* last modified November 22, 2013, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/22/cs-lewis-50-year-death_n_4325358.html, accessed October 15, 2017.

David Theroux likewise highlights the enduring popularity and reach of Lewis, including

The Screwtape Letters:

Lewis's books have been translated into more than 40 languages and have sold millions of copies. The seven books that make up *The Chronicles of Narnia*, first published more than 60 years ago, have sold the most—estimated at 150 million copies—and have been popularized on stage, TV, radio, and the movies. Since 2001, *Mere Christianity* has sold 3 million copies and *The Screwtape Letters* 2 million copies. It is estimated that annual sales of Lewis's books range as high as 6 million copies. In all there are 110 authored or edited books by Lewis and about 300 books that discuss him and his work, with additional new ones published every year, many as bestsellers. The combined box office sales for the three Narnia films so far total \$1.5 billion, and the film series is the 24th highest grossing of all time. A 4th film, based on *The Silver Chair* is now in production.³⁹

C.S. Lewis is the “rookie” on the selected list of works chosen for this project. However, the profound depth, weight, and significance of his thought are of the same spirit of those whose fountains of wisdom he so freely drank.

The Holy Bible

Even those who are truly biased, if they're honest, cannot discount the enormous influence of the Bible upon our culture, society, and the Western world. In fact, the Bible's impact was so significant that the editors of the *Great Books of the Western World* didn't include a version of the Bible in their set because of the pervasive nature of its significance and ownership. Jaroslav Pelikan explains:

When the set of *Great Books of the Western World* was published in 1952, its editor, Robert Maynard Hutchins, longtime president and chancellor of the University of Chicago, explained: ‘Readers who are startled to find the Bible omitted from the set will be reassured to learn that this was done only because Bibles are already widely distributed, and it was felt unnecessary to bring

39. David J. Theroux, “Why C.S. Lewis Is as Influential as Ever,” *Independent Institute* August 3, 2015, <http://www.independent.org/issues/article.asp?id=7468>, accessed November 16, 2017.

another, by way of this set, into homes that had several already; but references to the Bible are included in its *Syntopicon* or index.’⁴⁰

The theologian Norman Geisler likewise notes the evidence for the Bible’s influence is manifold in the historical record of our civilization. The moral virtues espoused in the scriptures are in large part responsible for molding and shaping our world. He states:

The influence of the Bible and its teaching in the Western world is clear for all who study history. And the influential role of the West in the course of world events is equally clear. Civilization has been influenced more by the Judeo-Christian Scriptures than by any other book or series of books in the world. Indeed, no greater moral or religious work in the world exceeds the depth of morality in the principle of Christian love, and none has a more lofty spiritual concept than the biblical view of God. The Bible presents the highest ideals known to men, ideals that have molded civilization.⁴¹

Of all the Great Books, the Bible will forever be the greatest, as it is the Divine Author who inspired its pages. The Apostle Peter while inspired by the Holy Spirit rightly states, “For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21).

The Formation Of A Worldview In Emerging Adults

As the context of this project was a university community of (primarily) emerging adults, it was essential to survey age-appropriate perspectives on how these students engage their world and form their worldview. Jeffrey Arnett’s work, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties*, frames this

40. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Whose Bible Is It? A Short History of the Scriptures*, (New York: Penguin, 2005), 209.

41. Norman Geisler, “Investigating the Bible’s Influence,” *Focus Press* October 23, 2017, <https://www.focuspress.org/2017/10/23/investigating-bibles-influence/>, accessed November 10, 2017.

generation as one in transition but inclined to begin resolving some of life's more enduring issues and questions:

Emerging adulthood is a crucial time for the development of a world view, as it is for other aspects of identity development. The process takes place throughout childhood and intensifies in adolescence as we develop the capacity for the kind of abstract reasoning that can be applied to world view questions about concepts such as God, death, and right and wrong. However, for most people, the process of forming a world view is not completed by the time they leave adolescence. It is during emerging adulthood that people address worldview questions most directly, and it is during emerging adulthood that most people reach at least an initial resolution to their worldview questions. Like love and work, forming a world view becomes more intensive and serious in emerging adulthood. Few people enter emerging adulthood at age 18 with a well-established world view, but few people leave their twenties without one, just as few people leave their twenties without a definite direction in love and work.⁴²

Murray and Nash mention the importance of allowing these learners to be part of the process:

To encourage students to be the primary initiators of their own deep learning means that we need to recognize and respect the existential autonomy of each and every learner who comes into our learning spaces. In some cases the invitation to learn deeply and for meaning will be a student's first awakening to self—not as a passive receptor of information supplied by another but as the primary agent in the learning process. Suddenly the educational process becomes dynamic, with lasting effects.⁴³

When a student becomes more than a mere “passive receptor,” learning truly comes alive. No longer is the material stuck in the conceptual realm; it is practical and effective. Concepts become convictions, and they have lasting effects on the learner.

42. Jeffrey Jenson Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 166.

43. Michele C. Murray and Robert J. Nash, *Helping College Students Find Purpose: The Campus Guide to Meaning-Making*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 93-94.

Emerging adulthood also makes room for instructors, though perhaps not instructors as simply expert opinion-makers. An educator should work with the student, inviting them into the process by actively taking an interest in their “efforts to make meaning.” Murray and Nash explain:

A vast amount of current research shows that when students are directly involved with their own learning; when they are given the freedom to design activities that complement what they are learning in the classroom; when they have educators in their lives who are willing to make personal connections with them, and who express a genuine interest in their developing efforts to make meaning; and when they see the connections between subject matter, personal development, and career choices—then and only then does education matter.⁴⁴

Murray and Nash also highlight how an educator’s investment in the relational component of learning creates an environment in which the student’s formation accelerates. Going beyond information transfer and data accumulation significantly enhances the educational process. Students are encouraged to own their education while the educators encourage the pursuit—not by pontificating or spewing out information, but by working with and coming alongside the students to help them find meaning. Murray and Nash continue:

Students take center stage on the meaning-making college campus. At best, we educators are located somewhere backstage or in the orchestra pit. Only secondarily, if at all, are we there to direct or choreograph. Neither is our classroom function primarily to provoke, expound, propound, and complexify. These latter pedagogical functions—the conventional practices of most higher educators—can only blunt and defeat students’ pursuit of meaning-making.⁴⁵

44. Murray and Nash, *Helping College Students Find Purpose*, 95.

45. Murray and Nash, *Helping College Students Find Purpose*, 102.

Christian Smith and Patricia Snell in their important work on the spiritual development of emerging adults, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*, comment that the “central, fundamental, driving focus in life of nearly all emerging adults” is their movement toward autonomy and standing on their own:

The central, fundamental, driving focus in life of nearly all emerging adults is getting themselves to the point where they can 'stand on their own two feet.' Life's major challenge for them is transitioning from dependence to independence, from reliance on others to self-sufficiency, from being under others' authority and eye to living on their own.⁴⁶

This self-sufficiency, while an important element in the timeline of developing personal independence, can work against a more essential formation, however, when one considers the soul's standing before God. David P. Setran and Chris A. Kiesling note in *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood* that obstacles can appear when emerging adults try to make meaning a function of what is good *for them*:

The 'therapeutic' side of this emerging adult faith also sets up barriers to ongoing spiritual formation. In these years, faith is often perceived as a lifestyle-enhancing appliance, a means of making a better life and meeting one's needs. God, in this sense, is still primarily viewed as what Smith called in an earlier book a 'combination Divine Butler and Cosmic Therapist,' on call and waiting to supply things that will enhance personal happiness. Such a perspective creates a number of challenges. First, faith itself can be viewed as merely a tool of personal happiness. If it is true that within Moralistic Therapeutic Deism 'the central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself,' the potential for self-worship is quite high. What is even more dangerous here is that emerging adults can be swayed to use God as the currency needed to purchase personal idols. They can begin to think that they want God in their lives so that they can get a good job with a good income, find a great spouse, be free from depression, and have someone around to help solve their problems. They come to the place where, as Larry Crabb puts it, they 'see Christ as a savior from pain, not from sin; as a responsive benefactor rather than a

46. Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious & Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 35.

Holy Lord... Therefore, many emerging adults are not formed by the Christian faith into the image of Christ but are rather forming a faith that will shape them into their own image of happiness.’⁴⁷

When faith itself is viewed as a means to personal fulfillment or merely an antidote that provides self-help, then a therapeutic gospel—which is NO gospel—has perverted the biblical message for an idol. Emerging adults are looking to see “what works” in a pragmatic sense with happiness as their chief end.

James Fowler, building upon the work of developmental psychologists such as Piaget and Erikson, developed a theory of spiritual stages (Stages of Faith) that individuals move through as they grow in faith. Emerging adults increase in their reflective capacities, moving from a greater degree of external authority to internal authority. Davis and Olson explain:

The transition from youth to young adulthood is one filled with uncertainty. This move has long been the focus of developmental theorists like Piaget and Erikson, and it continues to be a priority of educators who work with emerging adults. What does it mean to become ‘adult’ and how can this transition be facilitated within a community of faith? One of the most influential theorists dealing with spiritual development is James Fowler. In his book *Stages of Faith*, Fowler (1981) developed a model for the stages humans traverse as they grow into mature adult faith. He proposed a six-stage comprehensive system that describes the process of spiritual development from childhood through adulthood. ... In the fourth stage, individuated–reflective faith (young adulthood and beyond), authority moves from external to internal. Old assumptions are reexamined and responsibility is taken in a new way. The individual moves away from being defined by the group, and relationships are chosen based on self-authored beliefs or values.⁴⁸

47. David Setran and Charis Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 23-24.

48. Kate Nelson, “Meeting the Transitional Needs of Young Adult Learners,” *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, eds. C. Amelia Davis and Joann S. Olson no. 143, Fall 2014, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2014), 52-53.

Dorothy Sayers realized the importance of “owning” one’s beliefs and values and passionately argued for education that would equip students to learn for themselves and not be beholden to mere methods or instructors that would simply feed them information. In her influential essay entitled “The Lost Tools of Learning” she quips,

The combined folly of a civilization that has forgotten its own roots is forcing them to shore up the tottering weight of an educational structure that is built upon sand. They are doing for their pupils the work which the pupils themselves ought to do. For the sole true end of education is simply this: to teach men how to learn for themselves; and whatever instruction fails to do this is effort spent in vain.⁴⁹

The Great Books’ content and approach to learning is perfectly situated to inspire the emerging adult learner to release the self-teacher within themselves. This process both empowers and encourages the learner to go to greater depths in both shared inquiry *and* self-discovery.

The Value Of The Great Books In The Life Of The Learner

Mortimer Adler, in his classic work *How to Read a Book*, shares how enlightenment is more than being *informed*. Enlightenment occurs when we are *transformed* by understanding the greater realities birthed by the information in front of us. He states,

To be informed is to know simply that something is the case. To be enlightened is to know, in addition, what it is all about: why it is the case, what its connections are with other facts, in what respects it is the same, in what respects it is different, and so forth. This distinction is familiar in terms of the differences between being able to remember something and being able to explain it. If you remember what an author says, you have

49. Dorothy Sayers, “The Lost Tools of Learning” essay first presented at Oxford University in 1947, <http://www.gbt.org/text/sayers.html>, accessed December 14, 2017.

learned something from reading him. If what he says is true, you have even learned something about the world. But whether it is a fact about the book or a fact about the world that you have learned, you have gained nothing but information if you have exercised only your memory. You have not been enlightened. Enlightenment is achieved only when, in addition to knowing what an author says, you know what he means and why he says it.⁵⁰

In coming to know “what an author says,” it is important to read and understand the text by the author himself. Each additional translator or commentator removes the learner another degree further from the original source. Of course, those who lack knowledge of an author’s native tongue are at the mercy of the translator. For example, one may come across the words of Jesus explained in a commentary. While probably helpful, the commentator’s words of interpretation will color one’s understanding of the text. An additional filter may come in the form of the commentator’s instruction on how one should see the text. This may be useful when trying to understand archaic terms and historical contexts, but in matters of the heart, it has the potential to be less constructive and possibly even detrimental if it draws one away from capturing the author’s intent (as opposed to the translator’s intent).

Marcus Berquist, one of the founding members of St. Thomas Aquinas College, a Catholic Great Books school, had this to say contrasting primary and secondary (interpretive) sources:

Another reason why the great books are preferred to textbooks is that the latter, almost without exception, are ‘secondary sources’—that is, they are two steps removed from reality. They are, as it were, thoughts about thoughts. The great books, by contrast, are much closer to common experience in its fullness; they raise questions and pursue inquiries which arise directly from a wonder about things themselves. On

50. Mortimer Adler and Charles Van Doren, *How to Read a Book*, (New York: Touchstone, 1972), 23.

this account, they are of the greatest importance to beginners, for they begin where thought itself must begin if it is to bear any fruit. ... Students are thereby allowed and encouraged to become directly familiar with the greatest minds. They are not limited to what passes through the minds of their instructors and the authors of textbooks, which can hardly be more than diminished and perhaps distorted views of what exists more fully and more powerfully in the great books themselves. And when educators themselves have been educated in such a way, and for many generations, the original light can scarcely be seen. But with a study of the great books, students have a much better chance to encounter wisdom and to become wise themselves.⁵¹

Going straight to the original sources can encourage the love of learning for pursuing wisdom, rather than just information or knowledge, as it requires one to formulate their own interpretations rather than compile those of numerous literary critics. Moreover, in the context of a Great Books education, students bring their interpretations to the table and also finesse their opinions by discussing the text with their peers. This is of immense practical value to the learner. David Crabtree, one of the founders of Gutenberg College, another Great Books school, has this to add:

A great books education creates an educational environment conducive to the learning of wisdom. Classes are small, personal, and largely discussion based. The small class size and the discussion format encourage each student to be actively involved in consideration of important issues, and they allow the course of the discussion to be tailored to the concerns of the students. The writings of the most influential thinkers of our cultural tradition are studied, which provides many thought-provoking insights into the fundamental questions. As students work to understand these writings, they develop important learning skills—reading with understanding, thinking clearly, and writing cogently—which equip them to become life-long learners.⁵²

51. Marcus Berquist, "Why the Great Books?" *Thomas Aquinas College*, (Santa Paula, CA: no date, <https://thomasaquinas.edu/a-liberating-education/why-great-books>, accessed December 20, 2017.

52. David Crabtree, "Why a Great Books Education is the Most Practical!" Eugene, OR: MacKenzie Study Center, 1996, under "Gutenberg College," <http://msc.gutenberg.edu/2001/02/why-a-great-books-education-is-the-most-practical/>, accessed December 20, 2017.

Patrick S.J. Carmack, the president of Angelicum Academy, echoes these sentiments:

Because persons of great wisdom are rare and generally unavailable to us due to distance or death, we enter into conversation with them through their books, which record their thought. In doing so we soon discover how all the authors of great books used this same method of study themselves—conversing with or reading the great books of the sages of earlier generations as their starting point. In so doing they avoid having to re-invent the wheel each generation; they avoid mistakes already dealt with and build on existing foundations. Indeed, what would be the point in studying mediocre works by lesser luminaries or beginning all thought over from square one every few years, when great books by the wisest people—the great sages of civilization—are now readily available?⁵³

The dialectical nature of a Great Books approach lends itself to disagreeing viewpoints, encourages critical thinking in this pursuit of wisdom. They provide no automatic balm or value, however, for the light-hearted reader. Their content is weighty, even as disagreement remains among the works and those who champion them:

By what standard are they judged great? Is it that they contain a true doctrine about the highest matters? Perhaps some of them do, but taken as a group they disagree radically among themselves about these very matters, not only in regard to the truth about them but also in regard to the right method of pursuing that truth. They even disagree about what is worth studying and whether there are actually any ‘highest matters.’⁵⁴

The nature of these works, however, will open up pathways to the learner that mere facts cannot penetrate. The enduring value of wisdom will lead the learner to constantly ask the penetrating “why” questions. Norris Archer Harrington writes,

Despite his many claims of ignorance Socrates understood better than those with whom he spoke that it was not enough simply to ‘learn’ facts,

53. Patrick S. J. Carmack, “Why Study the Great Books?” *Academy Bookstore* January 18, 2008, <http://greatbooksacademy.org/great-books-program/great-books-articles/why-study-the-great-books/>, accessed December 30, 2017.

54. Berquist, “Why the Great Books?”

to memorize lessons, or to parrot lectures. To know truly, to seek wisdom, one must work toward understanding. If the question ‘what’ leads us to see what we do and do not know, then the question ‘why’ leads us to understand our world in a more full and fundamental manner.⁵⁵

This drive to *know* more fully is greatly enhanced by digging into the greatest minds who have written the greatest works about the greatest and most fundamental issues and themes.

Summary

This chapter has explored some important voices in the continuing discussion surrounding the validity and viability of the “Western Canon” of Great Books. As this dissertation project used a selection of these works, the ongoing significance of the specific Great Books that were used were respectfully noted for their historic and continued importance. Because this project was conducted in a college setting, the developmental perspectives of emerging adults was also surveyed. Additionally, the value of the Great Books in the life of the learner was referenced and explored.

The following chapter will be dedicated to the project itself. The project was designed to analyze the potential impact of using a dialectical approach in studying the Great Books on the spiritual formation of my students. The project spanned several semesters and used both electives chapels and semester-long courses.

55. Norris Archer Harrington, “What is the Socratic Method?,” *Angelicum Academy* website, no date, <http://www.angelicum.net/degree-program/great-books-program/overview-of-the-program/great-books-method/>, accessed December 30, 2017.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT DESIGN

Introduction

This project was established to explore the role of questions in spiritual formation using a Great Books approach within the setting of a Christian college. Several steps were involved in formulating and executing the project. Chapter One previously examined the overall ministry context and explained the concept of a Great Books methodology, the necessary university approvals, and the research methodology to be used. Additional steps of execution are discussed in this chapter, including the initial marketing of the idea, planning and negotiation, class contexts, Great Book selections, soliciting the students' written responses to important questions and prompts, classroom setup, discussion introduction, selections of student and group work that determined the flow of the discussions, and peer evaluation.

Establishing The Great Books Settings

In order to carry out this project, it was necessary to establish a Great Books option at the University of Valley Forge (UVF) in two different settings. The first setting, the Elective Chapel, was designed to create an environment in which the concept of shared inquiry could be introduced to students and practiced in front of a more diverse, campus-wide audience (academic years 2013-2016). Elective chapels took place on most

Fridays during the academic year during the chapel hour (10:00 – 11:00 A.M.)¹ The second setting, semester long seated courses, were modified to include a Great Books component throughout each semester of the project (academic years 2014-2017). Because this project required the use of several Great Books, it also required several courses to explore these various books and the dialectical model. Hence, these courses were scheduled over several semesters according to the university's catalog and the needs of the various programs in which the courses were offered.

Elective Chapel Setting

The Elective Chapel provided the first pathway to start the project. Because it was accessible to all students regardless of program of study or class (freshmen to seniors), it allowed a wide scope of participation. The first Elective Chapel options offered to the students were announced the day before the chapels were due to meet. The description in the communiqué stated the following:

*The "Great Books" Elective Chapel Meetings: Fall 2013
First Meeting: August 30 – Dante's Divine Comedy: Intro, Canto I
Great Books Seminar: Dante's Divine Comedy
Topic: Discussion & Thoughtful Reflection on Dante's Divine Comedy, Material Provided
Hosted By: Professor MacLean and the Honors Committee*

Figure 3: Elective Chapel Communiqué

1. On the University of Valley Forge website, the scope and purpose of the various chapel experiences are described: "The University of Valley Forge (UVF) regards the chapel experience as an essential foundation for producing Christian leaders to serve in the church and in the world. Chapel services offer a unique opportunity for the University community to join together in praise and worship, teaching and information, and to allow the gifts of the Spirit to operate corporately. Chapel services have a broad variety of themes that are reflective of the over-arching goals of the University. From weekly missions-emphasis chapels, to concerts, to elective chapels, chapel services are an important part of daily life at UVF," <https://www.valleyforge.edu/faith-service/chapel/>, accessed January 20, 2017.

Having no idea how many students to expect for that first meeting, I established a benchmark of thirty and was then assigned to a regular classroom that would accommodate that number. At the beginning of the first meeting, so many students flooded the classroom that it quickly became apparent that the room was too small. I expeditiously secured an unoccupied room down the hall that could accommodate fifty students, but the students quickly filled those seats, precipitating the need to grab extra chairs from the previous room. I then had to decide how to arrange the chairs, for the room wasn't conducive to the Shared Inquiry methodology I wanted to employ. I asked the students to remove the chairs from around the several tables that were present in the room; unfortunately, the tables were fixed because of computer cables stapled in place, or I would have created a box shape out of the tables. We made due by creating a circle of chairs around the room. There were fifty-seven students present—far too many to have an ideal discussion as I had pictured it.

After consulting some colleagues and reflecting on the initial Great Books meeting, I decided that it was necessary to make some adjustments for our next meeting. As elective chapels are by nature discretionary in that students have several options from which to choose each week, attendance can vary greatly from meeting to meeting. The Great Books elective chapel was assigned a larger room for the next meeting—this time enough to accommodate fifty students. Once again we filled the room. There was a large contingent of returning students as well as a few new ones.

Rather than set up all the chairs in a circle in the room, I had the students sit facing each other in five rows of ten on either side. This simple modification greatly

assisted our discussion. It was less truncated, and the flow of conversational was much more natural. The following figure illustrates this setup:

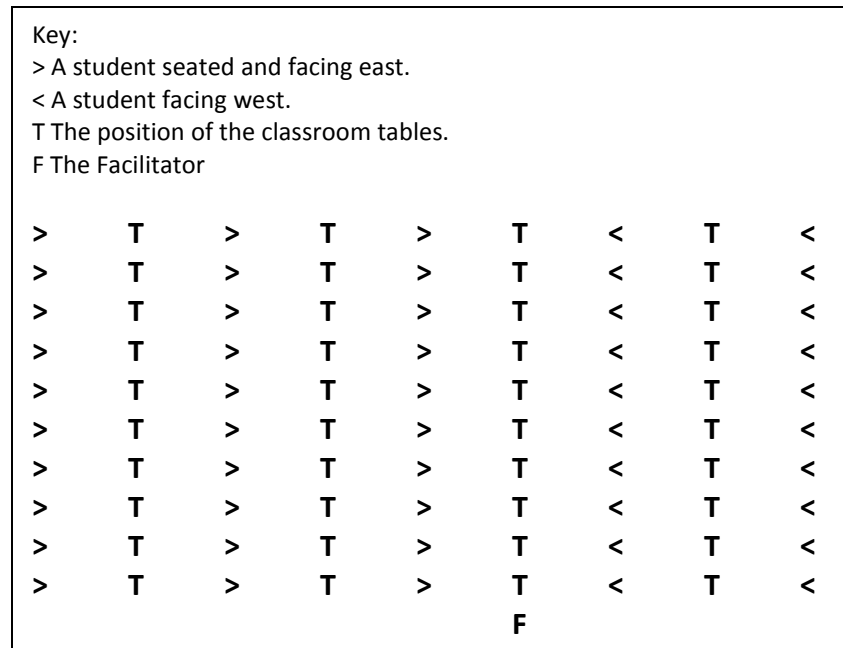


Figure 4: Classroom Setup

As the facilitator, I sat in a chair represented by the letter “F” and indicated that the students in the rows immediately to my left and right were for those who would be responsible for carrying the bulk of the discussion for that particular chapel. Those who sat in these two rows would not have to raise their hand to contribute, allowing for a free-flowing discussion around the questions that I (and they) would pose. Those seated in the outer rows would have to raise their hand to participate in the discussion.

This structure for this elective chapel was repeated for all subsequent chapel meetings throughout the duration of this project. The chapel format consistently generated significant student interest, and the number in attendance averaged in the low forties for each of the three academic years.

Semester Seated Course Setting

The second setting for this project was a series of specific semester-long seated courses, including Theology I, Theology II, Theology III, Life Formation, and First Year Experience, in which students could be part of a more in-depth Great Books experience. Each one of these courses differed in scope, sequence, and catalog definitions.² The students who participated in these seated classes were a more “constant set” to evaluate. These students were together for the entirety of a semester, whereas some of the students from the elective chapels would only be present for specific weeks.

For the seated classroom settings, a significant portion of each course was arranged around the selection of specific Great Books and the methodology detailed in this project. However, there were occasionally times when lectures were necessary or preferred, depending on the specific objectives and outcomes of each course.

2. University of Valley Forge 2017-2018 Catalog, <https://www.valleyforge.edu/wp/wp-content/uploads/Documents/Catalog/2017-18-catalog-8-22-17.pdf>, accessed January 20, 2017.

THE 243 Theology I: A study of the introduction to theology, the defense of the faith, and the doctrines of the Bible and revelation, God, creation, and angels. Special attention is given to Assemblies of God issues (Technically: Prolegomena, Apologetics, Bibliology, Theology Proper, Cosmology, and Angelology).

THE 303: Theology II: A study of the doctrines of humanity, sin, Christ, and salvation. Special attention is given to Assemblies of God issues. (Technically: Anthropology, Hamartiology, Christology, and Soteriology).

THE 353 Theology III: A study of the doctrines of the Holy Spirit, the Church, and death and the end times. Special attention is given to Assemblies of God issues. (Technically: Pneumatology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology: Personal and General).

SOC 103 Life Formation: A practical study of the classic spiritual disciplines that are essential to lifelong spiritual formation from a Pentecostal perspective. The course will emphasize intentional and holistic applications in daily living.

FYE 030 First Year Experience: The First Year Experience is a one-credit course taught by the honors faculty, along with peer mentors. It introduces new students to the culture at UVF by providing them with information and skills in three main aspects of the campus culture: personal excellence, leadership, and community. Students gain knowledge and skills for academic success, discover their potential for leadership, and as an integral member of the UVF community, embrace and contribute to our unique identity. This college preparation course is required for first time, full time, freshmen.

Occasionally, a specific discussion would lend itself to a hybrid learning environment in which the class would be split between dialectical and lecture components.

Determining The Great Books Selection

The process for determining the work for any elective chapel or semester-long class depended on several factors, including the class objectives and requirements, syllabi, writing assignments, and level—whether specifically introductory or at a higher academic level (Theology I, Theology II, or Theology III, etc.).

The influential works selected for the three elective chapels³ and five seated classes⁴ shared several important traits that set them apart as “classics” when compared to other works of literature. While no consistent canon exists that includes every classical work, there are various criteria that can be utilized to determine why a Great Book is considered to be great. One helpful example (as mentioned in Chapter One of this project) for determining criteria is offered in Louise Cowan’s *Invitation to the Classics*. She lists the following seven traits to show how a classical work of literature (or a Great Book) stands apart from others.

1. The classics not only exhibit distinguished style, fine artistry, and keen intellect but create whole universes of imagination and thought.
2. They portray life as complex and many-sided, depicting both negative and positive aspects of human character in the process of discovering and testing enduring virtues.
3. They have a transforming effect on the reader’s self-understanding.
4. They invite and survive frequent re-readings.

3. Elective chapels selections by academic year: Dante’s *Inferno*, 2013-14; Dante’s *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, 2014-15; C. S. Lewis’ *Screwtape Letters*, 2015-16.

4. Semester course selections by course and semester: Theology I: Augustine’s *Confessions*, Fall 2014; Theology II: Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, Spring 2015; First Year Experience: Plato’s *Republic*, Fall 2015; Theology III: *Church Fathers*, Fall 2015; Life Formation: *Holy Bible*, Spring 2016.

5. They adapt themselves to various times and places and provide a sense of the shared life of humanity.
6. They are considered classics by a sufficiently large number of people, establishing themselves with common readers as well as qualified authorities.
7. And, finally, their appeal endures over wide reaches of time.⁵

Sample Analysis: Dante's *Divine Comedy*

The following is an example of how this list of seven traits can be applied in helping to determine the suitability of a particular work in my initial implementation of the Great Books methodology at UVF. As the first work used in this project was Dante's *Divine Comedy*, it will serve as a useful evaluative template for examining these seven traits.

1. The classics not only exhibit distinguished style, fine artistry, and keen intellect but create whole universes of imagination and thought

Dante's *Divine Comedy* has been compared to a medieval cathedral because of its enormous vision and scope.⁶ It is by far the most monumental and most famous poem written in the Italian language. Dante even invented an entirely new rhyme scheme, *Terza Rima*, for this epic work, in part to honor the Holy Trinity. The poem creates a "whole universe" and more, encompassing Hell (*Inferno*), Earth (the Mount of Purgation or *Purgatorio*), and the Heavens (*Paradiso*). Dante's intellect as well as his creativity in the design and scope of his poetry is nothing short of genius; many count

5. Louise Cowan and Os Guinness, *Invitation to the Classics*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 21-22.

6. Albert Stanburrough Cook, introduction to *A Literary Middle English Reader*, (Boston: Atheneum Press/Ginn and Company, 1915), xv.

only Shakespeare as a possible equal. This comparison, however, can prove to be difficult, as John Kleiner, writing for *The New Yorker* explains, “The obvious comparison is to Shakespeare, but this is like trying to make sense of Mozart by means of Coltrane: the number of centuries that divide Dante from Shakespeare is practically as large as the number that separates Shakespeare from us.” ⁷

2. They portray life as complex and many-sided, depicting both negative and positive aspects of human character in the process of discovering and testing enduring virtues

Dante the Pilgrim⁸ (the main character of the poem) is exposed to the best and the worst of human history—both factual and mythical. Through dialog with numerous characters, the pilgrim is forced to examine his life in the light of eternal consequences. The *Divine Comedy* is a near encyclopedic journey into a moral education, utilizing scripture, history, and mythology. Dante the Pilgrim has lessons to learn, and he must be exposed to the best and worst of human nature to come to a deeper, fuller knowledge of his sin, himself, and God.

7. John Kleiner, “Dante Turns Seven Hundred Fifty,” *New Yorker* May 20, 2015, <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/dante-turns-seven-hundred-and-fifty>, accessed January 30, 2017.

8. *Dante the Pilgrim* as opposed to *Dante the Poet*. Some hold that the two are the same, while most believe that while *Dante the Poet* may be presenting auto-biographical material in the text, the differences between the two should be respected. In the rest of this paper, *Dante the Pilgrim* refers to the poem’s main character, while *Dante* refers to the poem’s author.

3. They have a transforming effect on the reader's self-understanding

It is difficult to fully describe the transformative power of this work on the reader's soul. The way Dante uses various punishments that reflect the sins committed by the characters throughout the *Inferno* is uncanny and brilliant. It allows readers to posit themselves into the text at numerous places as the sins that are mentioned are legion and very pervasive—if not in our own hearts, certainly in the world around us. In fact, Dante's title for his work was simply *La Commedia*;⁹ the additional "Divina" was added in the sixteenth century, as many believed that Dante received a divine vision as inspiration for his work.

Fabian Alphonse from University of Arizona, in an interview with La Monica Everett-Haynes, states, "Ultimately, Dante was attempting to address the 'big questions' associated with being: 'What is evil? What is human nature? What is redemption, goodness, sanctity?'"¹⁰ Dante works to address these in his poem, inviting the reader to reflect on the status of his or her own soul in the process.

4. They invite and survive frequent re-readings

It has been said that once a person has read *The Comedy*, he is then ready to read *The Comedy*. There are so many layers and angles to this work that it would be difficult to ever exhaust, especially considering the scope of the material. It can be read

9. or *Comedy*: This connotes a completed work, one that ends well, not as something "funny" as the term is most often used today.

10. La Monica Everett-Haynes, "Why Dante's *Inferno* Stays Relevant After 700 Years," *Futurity* November 17, 2016, <https://www.futurity.org/dante-divine-comedy-hell-1299902-2/>, accessed November 10, 2017.

on the literal level, taking as fact the geographies of Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven as the poet presents them. Most choose, however, to read and reflect on the work presented as a “moral geography”—a map of the soul which is constantly in motion and prone to change as the state of one’s heart develops and transforms. Perhaps it is proper to mention here that one doesn’t read Dante as much as Dante reads the one who is reading the poem, for the work is highly introspective.¹¹

5. They adapt themselves to various times and places and provide a sense of the shared life of humanity

The reader of the *Divine Comedy* will find that the content is not only full of references to various historical times and places, but also bursting with relatable characters and themes. The sinful nature of humankind is on stark display. Notably, though, the obviously crude and gross and sins are not treated specially by the poet; Dante addresses anything that prevents the heart from worshiping God as sin. This is relatable to all people, notwithstanding the desire for many modern thinkers to deny or redefine sin’s nature.

11. Dante’s letter to his patron, Can Grande, presents a hermeneutical key that will assist the reader regarding literal, allegorical, and spiritual aspects of the work. If interested, an online version can be found here: “Dante to Cangrande: English Version,” ed./trans. James Marchand, no date, <http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/jod/cangrande.english.html>, accessed December 20, 2017.

6. They are considered classics by a sufficiently large number of people, establishing themselves with common readers as well as qualified authorities

Dante's *Divine Comedy* has been in constant circulation since its creation in the 1300s, and each year more translations are published internationally, not to mention the ever-increasing number of books and articles that critique it. Dante's work is unique; he not only created his own rhyming scheme but also wrote the work in the language of the people as opposed to the more established and expected classical Latin of the day. Dante's poem has always been accessible to those who desire to read it.

7. And, finally, their appeal endures over wide reaches of time

As previously mentioned, Dante's works have been in constant circulation around the globe and continue to convict and inspire a wide audience. The *Inferno* is very often read in high school- and college-level literature courses, as well as in philosophy and theology courses at nearly every college, university, and seminary. Many schools in Italy still use Dante's work in its original dialect as a tool to teach Italian to students. It continues to inspire and challenge a wide range of readers from all different walks of life.

Book Selection

After receiving conditional approval to begin an elective chapel that incorporated a Great Books methodology for the Fall 2013 semester, several Great Books were considered. Ultimately the agreed-upon choice was Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The work was selected for the astonishing scope and breadth of persons and topics

presented—on Earth, in Hell, in Purgatory, and in Heaven—including the past, present, and future states of humankind. In using Dante as the primary source for our undertaking, we knew that there would be no lack of questions to pose or issues to discuss, dissect, and evaluate.

Sample Initial Orientation And Introduction

A sample initial orientation and introduction of Dante's work within the elective chapel setting offered a wide overview of topics and themes that could be useful to discuss for the purposes of encouraging positive spiritual formation: In the opening canto¹² of the *Divine Comedy*, Dante the Pilgrim, (the poem's narrator), describes his emotional and spiritual crisis. He has lost his way—alone, isolated, and in the grip of a terrible fear. He's not yet sure how he got into such a terrible state, but at least he acknowledges it, confessing how lost he has become. For the poet, the experience was only too real. He had personally lost nearly everything—his family, friends, reputation, property, career, and citizenship in his beloved Florence, which was then a city-state. He was banished from all that he loved and left homeless, poor, and hopeless. All his usual supports are gone, his political and literary ambitions frustrated, his self-respect lost, his very soul alienated from itself, human community, and God. Yet God did not abandon the poet or the pilgrim. His voice and grace were ever-present, and Dante the Pilgrim comes around to his spiritual senses when he is greeted by Virgil, who represents

12. A canto is a segment into which some long poems are divided. Dante's *Divine Comedy* is broken into 100 of these cantos across its three books—33 each in *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*, with an extra introductory canto at the beginning of *Inferno*.

reason, and later reacquainted with Beatrice, representing divine love. They help the pilgrim with his ascent until he receives the ultimate beatitude, an encounter with the Holy Trinity.

Dante's *Divine Comedy* fulfilled all the criteria and was chosen as the focus of the first implementation of the project.

Introduction To Discussion Methodology For Students

At the first elective chapel meeting, I spent the first part of the class introducing both the Great Books approach and Dante's *Divine Comedy*. I set a chair in the middle of the room and placed a copy of Dante's *Inferno* on the chair, explaining how Dante would be the instructor for this class and how the rest of us were obligated to understand what he had to say. Thus, we would all be students—including myself, the “professor”—and my role would be merely to direct the “traffic” of discussion using a series of questions.

I explained that since this would be a free-flowing discussion, students should not raise their hands, but only one person could address the question at a time or add an additional question to one that had already been posed. I emphasized the importance of letting the author of the Great Book speak, so quoting from the work at hand was expected and appropriate. The goal would be to be in “conversation” with the author, theme, or topic being discussed.

Round Table Discussion Samples from Elective Chapels

As a way of providing a sample round table discussion, what follows is a summary of the first meetings from the elective chapel discussions.

Dante's *Divine Comedy*

I proceeded to pass out a copy of the first canto of the *Inferno*.¹³ We circled around the room with each student reading a *terza*¹⁴ translated into English.¹⁵ After we finished reading the canto, I posed the first question: “What kind of credentials does a person have to have to show up as a character in Dante’s *Comedy*?”

The conversation that ensued offered several answers, with two replies that eventually stood out. First, a person has to be dead, and second, a person has to have lived before Dante penned his work. It was also mentioned that Dante had no lack of subjects if this were the case; plus, he was also free to use fictional figures (mythological and otherwise) if they served his purpose—a freedom he made liberal use of. The next question presented to the students addressed Dante the Pilgrim’s confused state: “What are some signs of sin’s ability to disorient Dante in Canto I”?

13. James Finn Cotter, trans. and Charles Franco, ed., *Dante Alighieri The Divine Comedy*, (NY: Stony Brook University, web edition, no date), <http://www.italianstudies.org/comedy/index.htm>, accessed from September, 2014 through May, 2016.

14. A “*terza rima*” is a series of three-line stanzas using the pattern A-B-A, B-C-B, C-D-C, D-E-D, etc. Dante invented this rhyming pattern to honor the Trinity. Here, “*terza*” is used to describe a single stanza. The English translation did not follow the same rhyme scheme as the original text.

15. One of the risks of having multiple students reading out loud is the different levels of ability that are manifested. Some students stumble over unfamiliar words, while others confidently bellow out phrases even if they aren’t pronounced correctly.

The students offered several answers directly from the text: “I found myself deep in a darkened forest,” “lost all trace of the straight path,” “How wild the forest was,” “fills my mind with panic,” “So bitter it is that death is hardly worse,” “So drowsy with sleep,” “wandered off from the true way,” “my worn-out body,” etc.¹⁶ Each response served to highlight Dante’s commentary on the damaging nature of sin and the pain of living one’s life separated from God’s presence.

Another important question was raised concerning the nature of the three beasts that hindered Dante’s ascent up the mountain: “What is the significance of the three beasts (leopard, lion, and wolf) that Dante lists in Canto I? Might this suggest a schema of how Hell is ordered?”

Students were quick to point out that the footnotes on the handout that I provided offered a possible explanation for the significance of the three beasts.¹⁷ While the footnote offered one possible explanation, I thought it was also important to point the students to Jeremiah 5:5-6:

I will go to the great and will speak to them, for they know the way of the Lord, the justice of their God. But they all alike had broken the yoke; they had burst the bonds. Therefore a lion from the forest shall strike them down; a wolf from the desert shall devastate them. A leopard is watching their cities; everyone who goes out of them shall be torn in pieces, because their transgressions are many, their apostasies are great.

16. Dante, *The Divine Comedy* Canto I, lines 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 28.

17. The note reads: “The allegorical meaning of the three beasts is not clear. One tradition maintains that the leopard is probably symbolic of fraud; the lion (l. 45) of violence; and the she-wolf (l. 49) of incontinence. Since these make up the three chief divisions of hell, the poet first encounters them in reverse order.”

Dante, both as pilgrim and poet, is being shredded and ripped apart by sin. Sin has devastating consequences, both in this realm and in the eternal realm to come. Though our society may minimize the seriousness of sin, Dante clearly does not.

Dante is not left to make the journey alone; he is provided several guides along the way. The first of these guides is the classical poet Virgil. Since I didn't know what the students knew about Virgil, the next question was exploratory in nature: "Why do you suppose Virgil is chosen to be Dante's guide? Do you think this is an adequate choice? Why or why not?"

The students' answers varied greatly. Some of them had minimal exposure to Virgil in specific classes, while others had never heard of him. I provided some brief background on why his choice as a guide was significant but also drew their attention to the text where Dante explicitly describes the profound impact Virgil has had on his own life:

O glory and light of all other poets,
May the long study and the profound love
That made me search your work come to my aid!
You are my mentor and my chosen author:
Alone you are the one from whom I have taken
The beautiful style that has brought me honor.¹⁸

Canto II, which we had not read yet, offers additional information on why Virgil was sent to the pilgrim, but even in the first canto, the pilgrim is clearly relieved to have a "familiar" presence with him as he begins to contemplate the arduous nature of the journey before him.

18. Dante, *The Divine Comedy* Canto I, lines 82-87

At our next elective chapel meeting, I handed out Canto II as well as a selection from Dante's *La Vita Nuova*.¹⁹ The students each read aloud a terza as we again went around the room, and I posed the following question to get the discussion started: "How would you describe or define Beatrice's rationale for wanting to assist Dante the Pilgrim?"

Several students then inquired concerning the nature of Dante's relationship with Beatrice. They commented that it seemed odd that there would be such a profound concern for a member of the opposite sex, and they also speculated about Dante and Beatrice's potential status as lovers. I had to remind everyone that we were obligated to derive our speculations from the text, but that Dante had also written some additional material that might assist us while examining this question.

I then proceeded to pass out copies of a selection of his *La Vita Nuova* to those present and we proceeded to examine it together. Dante describes the powerful impact a simple greeting from Beatrice had upon him. He states:

And when this most graceful one made things well by greeting me, it was not that Love so came between us that it could cloud in me the unbearable blessedness, but almost by overpowering sweetness it came to be such that my body, which was then wholly under its sway, often moved like a heavy and inanimate object. So it is clearly seen that all my blessedness, which often surpassed and overfilled my capacity, lay in her greeting.²⁰

This lead into the next question, which consisted of two parts: "What is the nature of

19. Dante, *La Vita Nuova*, trans. A. S. Kline, Poetry in Translation, 2000 XI-XX, <https://www.poetryintranslation.com/klineasthenewlife.php>, accessed September, 2014 through May, 2016.

20. *La Vita Nuova (The New Life)*, author's note: The "New Life" was one of Dante's earlier works and focused on literary criticism of his earlier poems on courtly love. Dante had a deep and profound love for Beatrice, but was unable to marry her as she was outside of his social class, and marriages were arranged.

this ‘love’ that is mentioned? How does God show grace tailored to Dante’s need?”

As I was unsure about how the students would respond to this, I was pleasantly surprised when several mentioned the multifaceted nature of God’s grace at work in different individuals. They seemed to appreciate the profound affection Dante had for Beatrice and wondered if the *Divine Comedy* was, in fact, a romance on some level. At the conclusion of our second meeting, it appeared to many that there might be more to Dante than the often-heard caricature of an embittered writer whimsically placing his enemies in Hell. In a January 20, 2014 article, “A Closer Look at Hell,” *The Culture Counter* blogger, Luuk Keijser wrote:

The most popular part of the trilogy, *Inferno* describes the nine circles of Hell and the punishment meted out to the sinners held within their domains. For this purpose, Dante uses poetic justice, finding retribution fitting to the crimes committed. In his journey he meets many famous sinners from mythology and history as well as among his contemporaries. He used people from his own time not just to register recognition and shock among his readers, but also in an opportunity to castigate political and personal enemies.²¹

The students concluded that there was more to the story and became more motivated to explore the nuances of Dante’s writings.

I was optimistic after making adjustments to the room’s setup and seeing that there was a solid core of returning students. They were excited. There was some good momentum building in the discussions. I expected that this momentum would be maintained for our third meeting and that it could result in a meaningful experience for the students within the developing model. I was not disappointed, as the room was

21. Luuk Keijser, “A Closer Look at Hell.” Web Blog post. *The Culture Counter Blog* January 20, 2014, <http://www.the-culture-counter.com/a-closer-look-at-hell/>, accessed September 8, 2014.

once again filled with eager students!

The content for discussion in the third meeting of our elective chapel came from Canto III of the *Inferno*. Because it serves as the entry to Hell, after going around the room and reading the Canto, I shared a dramatic audio version to assist with the processing of the dreadful images presented.²²

Through Me Pass into the Painful City,
Through Me Pass into Eternal Grief,
Through Me Pass among the Lost People.

Justice Moved My Master-Builder:
Heavenly Power First Fashioned Me
With Highest Wisdom and with Primal Love.

Before Me Nothing Was Created That
Was Not Eternal, and I Last Eternally.
All Hope Abandon, You Who Enter Here.²³

The power and depth of these words that form the inscription at the entry way of Dante's Hell provide significant substance to explore concerning the nature of Hell, the justice of God, and the relation of the two. My initial query for consideration gave the students significant latitude to explore this relation: "What might this inscription suggest about the Divine viewpoint on the lost and about the place or necessity of Hell in God's providence and plan?"

This initial question opened up several perspectives of the students ranging from positing the necessity of Hell as a matter of God's justice to the questioning of the need for such a torturous place. Others continued to struggle over the reality of the "levels"

22. Dante, *Inferno from the Divine Comedy*, trans. Benedict Flynn and narrated by Heathcote Williams, Naxos Audio Books (audio book), 2004.

23. Dante, *Inferno* Canto III, lines 1-9.

of punishment found in Dante's schema. One student wondered if the Holy Trinity was being referenced in the inscription, as it states *Heavenly Power [Father] First Fashioned Me, With Highest Wisdom [Son] and with Primal Love [Holy Spirit]*. The group thought that was an excellent possibility, and personally, I was thrilled that the text was being referenced. Students were penetrating the text with a clear theological lens.

The next question posed to the students addressed an important comment made by Dante's appointed guide, Virgil:

We are come to the place I spoke to you about
Where you shall see the sorrow-laden people,
Those who have lost the Good of the intellect.²⁴

"What is the significance of Virgil's claim that Hell is a place where people have 'lost the Good of the intellect?' What might this suggest?"

Students tackled this question with passion and were quick to comment on how "dumb" sin is. Another mentioned how sin is ultimately irrational, leading people to "rationalize" their own destruction in Hell. A third suggested that the *Imago Dei* had been so corrupted that there was little or nothing remaining from human nature; thus these souls in Hell were perpetually stuck in the consequences of their sinful lifestyles.

Many additional meetings and discussions occurred over the next couple of academic years, but this sampling is indicative of the general flow of the gatherings. For every elective chapel, I distributed, collected, and analyzed surveys at the end of each semester. The findings will be presented in chapter five of this project.

24. Dante, *Inferno*, Canto III, lines 16-18.

C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*

*The Screwtape Letters*²⁵ was extremely popular with our students, and discussions were always vibrant and thought-provoking. As with the other works utilized in this project, only a small sampling of the discussion questions and summarized student responses can be considered given the scope of this chapter. The format for this section of the project had an additional component. One of the classes that I teach at the university is an online course entitled, “The Theology of C. S. Lewis.”²⁶ This course is part of the Honors Program curriculum, and several of the students in the course also participated in the C. S. Lewis elective chapel. In addition, several of these students also met as a small group that used a Great Books model for discussion. These students had the benefit of receiving question prompts for reflective work beforehand, while those who simply attended the elective chapels did not.

In the first letter, Screwtape (a high-ranking demon) instructs his nephew, Wormwood (a lesser demon who is being mentored by Screwtape), not to argue with the subject (a human), but to distract him with the “stream” of his senses:

By the very act of arguing, you awake the patient’s reason; and once it is awake, who can foresee the result? Even if a particular train of thought can be twisted so as to end in our favour, you will find that you have been strengthening in your patient the fatal habit of attending to universal issues and withdrawing his attention from the stream of immediate sense experiences. Your business is to fix his attention on the stream. Teach him to call it ‘real life’ and don’t let him ask what he means

25. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1985).

26. UVF 2017-2018 Catalog, <https://www.valleyforge.edu/wp/wp-content/uploads/Documents/Catalog/2017-18-catalog-8-22-17.pdf>. Course description: *LIT 303 The Theology of C. S. Lewis*: This course explores the writing of C. S. Lewis, who insisted his works be judged by their literary merit and not only their theology. Themes of pain and suffering, the cultural relevance of Christianity, and biblical reflection in Lewis’s fiction and apologetics will be analyzed.

by 'real'.²⁷

The students were then asked why Screwtape would discourage the use of argument in temptations. In response, one student replied, "Arguments elicit Reason, and Reason elicits thoughts about universal issues."²⁸ Another responded,

Lewis indicated that in the past people always associated 'thinking' with 'doing' and would use this logic to prove or disprove something as right or wrong. Society has since switched its philosophy as a whole to treating ideas as interesting, courageous, provoking or strong. But this method won't awaken Reason, which is the demons' greatest enemy in trying to trick a human. Better to keep humans thinking about temporary, sense-oriented issues.²⁹

In the eighth letter, Lewis says (via Screwtape) that God (the "Enemy") cannot ravish His subjects; He can only woo them. The students were then queried as to how this distinction between being ravished and being wooed is manifested in the different ways God and the devil view human beings. One student replied, "The devil views human beings as creatures that must be consumed; the devil gets his meaning and worth out of stealing and ingesting the wills and souls of others."³⁰ Further, a student responded that "For God, humans are willful, self-conscious beings that must be wooed and loved into becoming qualitatively more like Him; God wants beings that are fulfilled and unified, yet distinct in personality and ontology from him."³¹

In the eleventh letter, the opposite natures of Heaven and Hell can be seen in the way Screwtape describes joy, or rather can't describe it because he can't understand

27. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 11.

28. Student one, male, junior, Elective Chapel, *Screwtape Letters* Letter 1, September 18, 2015. *Author's note regarding student responses: All interviews were confidential; the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

29. Student two, female, senior, Elective Chapel, *Screwtape Letters* Letter 1, September 18, 2015.

30. Student one, male, freshman, Elective Chapel, *Screwtape Letters* Letter 8, October 16, 2015.

31. Student two, female, junior, Elective Chapel, *Screwtape Letters* Letter 8, October 16, 2015.

it:

What that real cause is we do not know. Something like it is expressed in much of that detestable art which the humans call Music, and something like it occurs in Heaven—a meaningless acceleration in the rhythm of celestial experience, quite opaque to us. Laughter of this kind does us no good and should always be discouraged. Besides, the phenomenon is of itself disgusting and a direct insult to the realism, dignity, and austerity of Hell.³²

The students were asked about the nature of joy. What is joy? Why can't Screwtape understand it? One student replied, "Joy is a real human experience that is birthed from love, such as when family and friends are reunited, which the enemy wouldn't understand."³³ Another rightly reasoned, "Screwtape does not understand because it is so entirely tied in to the nature of God, for He is love, and a fruit of the Spirit is joy, and demons cannot understand the beauty of the things of Heaven."³⁴ An additional response noted the inability of evil to grasp it, saying "Screwtape cannot understand it because it cannot be created by evil, or even distorted by evil. It is a pure and divine gift."³⁵

Next, Screwtape provides a definition of Hell in the eighteenth letter. I was curious as to how the students would respond to this:

The whole philosophy of Hell rests on recognition of the axiom that one thing is not another thing, and, specially, that one self is not another self. My good is my good and your good is yours. What one gains another loses. Even an inanimate object is what it is by excluding all other objects from the space it occupies; if it expands, it does so by thrusting other objects aside or by absorbing them. A self does the same. With beasts the absorption takes the form of eating; for us, it means the sucking of will

32. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 51.

33. Student one, female, junior, Elective Chapel, *Screwtape Letters* Letter 11, October 30, 2015.

34. Student two, female, sophomore, Elective Chapel, *Screwtape Letters* Letter 11, October 30, 2015.

35. Student three, female, junior, Elective Chapel, *Screwtape Letters* Letter 11, October 30, 2015.

and freedom out of a weaker self into a stronger. 'To be' means 'to be in competition.'³⁶

The students were asked, "What is the 'whole philosophy of Hell?' Does it make sense? Is it logical? What is wrong with it?" One student suggested, "The whole philosophy of Hell rests on recognition of the axiom that one thing is not another thing, and, especially, that one self is not another self."³⁷ As to the notion of the logic or lack thereof concerning Hell's philosophy, another student said, "The philosophy of Hell is not logical: rather, it is un-logical or anti-logic. It rejects objectivity, truth, ethical absolutes, and other fundamentals of human understanding, morality, and society and instead warps them into untruths and subjectivities."³⁸ As to the rightness or wrongness of this philosophy, the students accurately claimed, "It is wrong because when everyone has their own definition of truth and/or good and evil, then there is no such thing as real truth or good or evil."³⁹

Round Table Discussion Questions And Selected Summary Samples From Seated Courses

Theology I and II: Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*, Augustine's *Confessions*, and John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*

Augustine's *Confessions* and carefully selected portions of Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* ⁴⁰ were chosen as the Great Books to unpack in class in Theology I. In

36. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 79.

37. Student one, male, junior, Elective Chapel, *Screwtape Letters* Letter 18, January 15, 2016.

38. Student two, male, junior, Elective Chapel, *Screwtape Letters* Letter 18, January 15, 2016.

39. Student three, male, freshman, Elective Chapel, *Screwtape Letters* Letter 18, January 15, 2016.

40. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Author's note: *Theology I* lays a foundation for further theological pursuits. The doctrine of God is introduced, so the selected questions we examined from the "Summa" included: I.2.3 Proofs for the Existence of God, I.3.2 God - Matter and Form, and I.12.4 How God is Known by Us.

Theology II, the class utilized the John Bunyan classic *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*

The Aquinas material worked well for this project because *Summa Theologica* was created and framed by Aquinas as a series of questions. The selected questions used for this project were presented as a handout that the students were asked to rewrite in their own words and to bring to class. Because understanding Aquinas requires a fair amount of philosophical detective work, some students were more successful with these requirements than others.

After reading the assigned "Summas," I proceeded to ask for student volunteers who were willing to share their rewritten questions with the class. This opened up a spirited discussion, and interesting feedback followed. Aquinas presents five proofs for consideration in response to the question of "Whether God Exists." After selected students presented their rewrites, the class pondered the clarity of the student work, as well as Aquinas's rationale. The entire class contributed to this completed rewrite for the "I answer that" portion provided below:

All things that are currently in motion must have been put in motion by some thing at some point. Nothing can spontaneously cause itself to be in motion. Any object that is in motion achieved that motion due to another motion-causing object. No object can be both in motion and a causer of its own motion. Therefore, another object must be credited with setting those objects in motion. This ultimate motion, as it could be called, has always been in motion and is the cause of all motion, and is agreed upon to be God.

Due to the rule of cause and effect, there must be an ultimate cause that sets other causes into action, bringing about effects. A cause cannot cause itself; it must be caused by something else. Similarly, an effect

cannot take place without causes. Cause and effects are inseparable, with the latter relying on the former. Any effect that takes place is due to a cause. Therefore, since causes and effects are taking place all around us, there must be an ultimate cause that sets all of these causes into effect. This cause is God.

Things exist because they were created; things cease to exist because they either decay or are destroyed. Nothing can spontaneously cause itself to exist nor can it exist forever (to exist is to have a beginning and an end). All things that exist must have been called into existence at some point in time; they did not simply exist on their own. In addition, things that exist do so out of necessity; they are necessary in order that other things may exist. Due to the fact that things cannot call themselves into existence and rely on other things to exist, there must be an ultimate Existence, which is God. He causes all else to exist and is therefore in Himself existence and necessity.

We classify things according to the amount of a certain character they possess. Something that is 'good' does not contain as much character of goodness as something that is 'better' or 'best'. If we classify all things in such a way, then there must be some perfect example against which we compare. We cannot say that something is good without knowing that which is best. Good is defined by the terms of something higher- better or best. There must be a constant against which objects are compared; we must have an understanding of that which we are categorizing according to the best representation of such a thing. Therefore, if we hold all things in the world to this system, we must have a perfect example to draw from, and that is God.

Natural things work in a way to achieve the best result. They do not possess intelligence and therefore do not know what is best. Yet, they continue to move toward the result that truly is most desirable. If natural things have no knowledge of which direction they are to be moving, then we must assume that there exists something that is directing them (for if they had no idea where to go and no outside direction, they most certainly would not proceed in the best way as they do.) Consequently, because natural objects do follow the best path, a Being must exist Who encompasses all intelligence Who is leading natural things in the best path. We believe this holder of all intelligence to be God.⁴¹

41. Student rewrite, Theology I, *Aquinas, Summa Theologica*, I.2.3 Proofs for the Existence of God, September 26, 2014 (est).

Augustine's *Confessions* And Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*

I provided question prompts for Augustine's *Confessions* and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*⁴² to the students to read and reflect upon a week in advance. These responses were graded and evaluated based upon the thoughtfulness and thoroughness of the answer. As the facilitator of the discussions, reading various students' responses beforehand allowed me to get a sense of the points at which students really pressed into the material and the points at which they stumbled along.

Each week, the students were instructed to read one "book" of the *Confessions* or two chapters of *Pilgrim's Progress*, according to the class schedule. The students were asked to upload their responses to question prompts onto the class learning management system as well as to bring a paper copy of their responses (listed below) to class to use, if needed, for the discussion on that week's reading.

There were over 30 students in each one of the seated classes (except for the honors section of the First Year Experience course), with over five prompt questions per week for ten or more weeks, leading to well over 1,500 responses per course. The nature of this project doesn't allow for all responses to be presented. However, I will provide selected question prompts and several discussion summary responses. These student responses are indicative of the direction of many of the course discussions that were utilized in the seated courses used in this project: Theology I, Theology II, Theology III, Life Formation, and First Year Experience. Further questions used in additional

42. See Appendix E. These questions were gleaned and adapted from numerous sources, including the author's participation in a Princeton Theological Seminary course: *Augustine's Confessions*, taught by Dr. Paul Rorem, in 1996.

courses of this project are provided as Appendix E.

Augustine's *Confessions*

One of Augustine's most famous quotes is found in the opening section of the *Confessions*, "The thought of you stirs him so deeply that he cannot be content unless he praises you, because you made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you."⁴³ The students were asked, "What does Augustine mean by this assertion?"

Students pondered and discussed this question thoughtfully, writing answers such as "This simply means that we were meant to have our hearts rest in God. It is literally what we were made to do. We were created by Him and for Him and we were created to rest in Him. We can find no true peace, satisfaction, joy, hope, or life apart from our Creator."⁴⁴ Another student stated, "Everything else is fleeting and temporary and will not ultimately bring rest or eternal satisfaction like He can. Much of what Augustine describes in this book is his distraction from the Creator by temporary pleasures and pursuits and he describes his memories of this mindset."⁴⁵ An additional student pointed out the reality of the challenge this passage presents to us in everyday life:

What a challenge this can be on earth because it's not difficult to get wrapped up in meaningless and temporal pleasures and push our Creator and the pursuit of Him off to the side, meanwhile this pursuit is the only thing that could ever truly matter since we were created by Him to know and rest in and love Him,

43. Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin, (London: Penguin, 1961), 21.

44. Student one, male, sophomore, Theology I, *Confessions* book 1, October 17, 2014.

45. Student two, male, junior, Theology I, *Confessions* book 1, October 17, 2014.

which results in infinitely more satisfaction than earthly pleasures that we so often end up seeking.⁴⁶

The next question sought to probe why sin turns us away from God rather than toward him.⁴⁷ One student answered, “Augustine claims that sin mainly turns us from God because we are seeking satisfaction apart from God. We seek the perfections found in God but only find perverse, impure, and earthly forms. When our heart does not seek out God, only things that imitate God, but perversely, remain.”⁴⁸ As a result, sin prevents us from experiencing the rich fellowship we were created to have with God. Another student rightly observed that “sin does not and cannot turn us toward God because the very act of sin means that we are seeking something other than God but in this search we will only ever find imperfection and impurity.”⁴⁹

In Book 4 of the *Confessions*, Augustine goes on to say: “Blessed are those who love you, O God, and love their friends in you and their enemies for your sake.”⁵⁰ The students were asked: if this is true, then why are we better served to love others ‘in’ God? One student noted that “Our human nature cannot purely and truly love people, without having God at the center of our person.”⁵¹ Another pointed to God’s nature and the importance of a relationship with God in the process:

God is love. Love is sacrifice. Love is thinking of the other person. A person cannot accept or understand this unless they have accepted Christ. If one does not love another person as though they are in God, they will love them as though they are fallible humans. People will fail, and unless they love them as though

46. Student three, female, sophomore, Theology I, *Confessions* book 1, October 17, 2014.

47. *Confessions* book 2, chapter 6.

48. Student one, male, sophomore, Theology I, *Confessions* book 2, October 31, 2014.

49. Student two, female, junior, Theology I, *Confessions* book 2, October 31, 2014.

50. *Confessions* book 4, chapter 9.

51. Student one, female, sophomore, Theology I, *Confessions* book 4, November 14, 2014.

they are in God, then they will not have the capability of it.⁵²

Augustine also poses a valuable question about whether it is better to know God or to know *all* things in Book 5:

O Lord God of truth, if a man is to please you, surely it is not enough that he should know facts like these? Even if he knows them all, he is not happy unless he knows you; but the man who knows you is happy, even if he knows none of these things. And the man who knows you, and knows these things as well, is none the happier for his knowledge of them: he is happy only because he knows you, and then only if he has knowledge of you and honors you and gives you thanks as God and does not become fantastic in his notions.⁵³

The students discussed the question and teased out various responses. One replied, “Knowledge in and of itself is completely useless apart from Him who gives all knowledge and from which all knowledge comes.”⁵⁴ Students identified the lack of satisfaction inherent in having knowledge of only the created sphere, and one responded, “We can be full of knowledge and yet be unsatisfied if we don’t know God because we are missing the Creator.”⁵⁵ Another student rightly noted, “Knowing God is infinitely more important than knowledge. We can never know everything and we were created as creatures to be dependent on God.”⁵⁶ The students acknowledged that it is far more blessed to know God than to possess all knowledge of worldly things by stating, “The one who does not have much knowledge but who knows and is dependent on God is truly more blessed than the one who has knowledge but does not know God.

52. Student two, male, junior, Theology I, *Confessions* book 4, November 14, 2014.

53. *Confessions*, book 5, chapter 4.

54. Student one, male, sophomore, Theology I, *Confessions* book 5, November 21, 2014.

55. Student two, male, junior, Theology I, *Confessions* book 5, November 21, 2014.

56. Student three, female, junior, Theology I, *Confessions* book 5, November 21, 2014.

Knowing the Creator is always infinitely more important than knowing the creation.”⁵⁷

The issue of the origin of evil is also a significant topic throughout the

Confessions. Augustine observes in Book 7:

So we must conclude that if things are deprived of all good, they cease altogether to be; and this means that as long as they are, they are good. Therefore, whatever is, is good; and evil, the origin of which I was trying to find, is not a substance, because if it were a substance, it would be good. For either it would be an incorruptible substance of the supreme order of goodness, or it would be a corruptible substance which would not be corruptible unless it were good.⁵⁸

In light of this statement, I asked the students about the nature of the relationship between goodness and existence. They responded thoughtfully,

Since God is good and God created everything, everything that exists is good. Everything that was created, which was created by God according to Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1, is good, and evil corrupts the goodness of existence. This does not mean that there is no goodness in evil things, it merely means that the goodness of the object has been distorted and corrupted.⁵⁹

Others added, “This also aligns with Augustine’s conclusion that, against his previous view of evil, evil is not an object or being because the existence of a being means some goodness in it. Therefore, evil is a corruption of humans and the earth and is not a being of evil. If evil were a substance, it would have some goodness and could not be pure evil.”⁶⁰

When speaking about the nature of the Word, especially regarding its relationship with time and eternity, Augustine thoughtfully relays:

57. Student four, female, senior, Theology I, *Confessions* book 5, November 21, 2014.

58. *Confessions* book 7, chapter 12.

59. Student one, male, junior, Theology I, *Confessions* book 7, November 21, 2014.

60. Student two, female, junior, Theology I, *Confessions* book 5, November 21, 2014.

It is in this way, then, that you mean us to understand your Word, who is God with you, God with God, your Word uttered eternally in whom all things are uttered eternally. For your Word is not speech in which each part comes to an end when it has been spoken, giving place to the next, so that finally the whole may be uttered. In your Word all is uttered at one and the same time, yet eternally. If it were not so, your Word would be subject to time and change, and therefore would be neither truly eternal nor truly immortal.⁶¹

As time-bound created beings, discussing the nature of eternity poses a significant challenge. Students were asked, “In what sense is God’s Word eternal?” Their answers were thought-provoking: “God’s Word is eternal in the sense it never passes away, returns to its place, or comes to be. Nothing in God’s Word does this, because that would imply time and change,”⁶² and “not a true eternity, nor truly immortal.”⁶³ Another said “God’s coeternal Word, by which all things are spoken eternally, is spoken eternally. We are not to understand God’s Word as follows: He speaks something, it comes to pass and finishes, and then God speaks something else and so on and so forth until his “series” is completed.”⁶⁴ Also, “He speaks all things, at the same time and forever. And His Word is eternally applicable.”⁶⁵ And, “What God spoke to Abraham thousands of years ago still applies to us today. His promises do not change. His standards do not change. His truths still change lives today because His Word is completely and wholly eternal.”⁶⁶

61. *Confessions*, book 11, chapter 7.

62. Student one, female, junior, Theology I, *Confessions* book 11, December 5, 2014.

63. Student two, male, sophomore, Theology I, *Confessions* book 11, December 5, 2014.

64. Student three, female, senior, Theology I, *Confessions* book 11, December 5, 2014.

65. Student four, male, junior, Theology I, *Confessions* book 11, December 5, 2014.

66. Student five, male, sophomore, Theology I, *Confessions* book 11, December 5, 2014.

John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*

John Bunyan's "pilgrim" was an incredibly helpful and instructive guide through Theology II. This course covered several essential topics, such as sin, salvation, sanctification, and Christology. Bunyan's allegory brought to light traditional theological themes in a candid conversational context. The initial questions posed to the students concerned the nature of being a pilgrim: "What does it mean to be a pilgrim? Why do you think the metaphor of pilgrimage is a fitting description of the Christian life?" Students were thoughtful in their responses: "As followers of Christ, we are on a pilgrimage toward our eternal destination. This pilgrimage is not just something that followers of Christ participate in or go to every once and a while; instead it is a lifestyle."⁶⁷ Another said, "This pilgrimage is all about being reconciled back to that ideal image of Creation, and how we were made in the image of God. It is about submitting our lives to the Lordship of Christ in all areas. It is about becoming like Christ in our mind, body, heart, and soul, which is the way we think, act, relate to others, and how we relate to God."⁶⁸ Also, "It is what God has called each and every one of us to when we choose him over everything else in this world, and we begin to work toward placing him at the center of our lives. A pilgrimage back to God is why each of us is here on this earth."⁶⁹

The sharp distinction between law and gospel is portrayed in this memorable section of *Pilgrim's Progress*:

67. Student one, male, junior, Theology II, *Pilgrim's Progress* intro, January 21, 2015.

68. Student two, female, sophomore, Theology II, *Pilgrim's Progress* intro, January 21, 2015.

69. Student three, male, junior, Theology II, *Pilgrim's Progress* intro, January 21, 2015.

Then he took him by the hand, and led him into a very large parlor that was full of dust, because never swept; the which after he had reviewed it a little while, the Interpreter called for a man to sweep. Now, when he began to sweep, the dust began so abundantly to fly about, that Christian had almost therewith been choked. Then said the Interpreter to a damsel that stood by, 'Bring hither water, and sprinkle the room;' the which when she had done, it was swept and cleansed with pleasure.⁷⁰

The students were then asked, "How is the heart of man like the dusty room, and what happens when the room is attempted to be cleaned with the broom of the law? What does this teach us about the law?" Their responses were encouraging, as they pondered the inadequacy of the law in dealing with the consequences of Original Sin: "The heart of man is like the dusty room due to Original Sin and the inward corruptions that make one's whole life unclean."⁷¹ Also, "This heart is one that has never been sanctified by the sweet Grace of the gospel. When a man tries to clean the room with the broom of the law and the broom of the law only, all of the dust just gets kicked around, but the room is not any cleaner."⁷² And, "This shows us that we need both the law and the gospel. The law alone cannot conquer all of the sin in our lives. With a little bit of water, the gospel, the whole room can easily and quickly be cleaned. Christ is the reality of which we live in."⁷³

Throughout the sanctification process, there are times and seasons during which one's spiritual vitality appears to wane—or leave all together. Bunyan appears to address this when he describes Christian losing his "roll" (the Scriptures):

70. John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress* second stage, WordSearch Bible Software.

71. Student one, male, sophomore, Theology II, *Pilgrim's Progress* second stage, February, 9, 2015.

72. Student two, female, junior, Theology II, *Pilgrim's Progress* second stage, February 9, 2015.

73. Student three, male, junior, Theology II, *Pilgrim's Progress* second stage, February 9, 2015.

But thinking again of what he had heard from the men, he felt in his bosom for his roll, that he might read therein and be comforted; but he felt, and found it not. Then was Christian in great distress, and knew not what to do; for he wanted that which used to relieve him, and that which should have been his pass into the celestial city. Here, therefore, he began to be much perplexed, and knew not what to do. At last he bethought himself that he had slept in the arbor that is on the side of the hill; and falling down upon his knees, he asked God forgiveness for that foolish act, and then went back to look for his roll.⁷⁴

The students were then asked, “What does it mean that Christian loses his scroll, and what does it teach us that it took a while before he realized it was gone?” Their answers were on target: “The fact that Christian loses his scroll seems to represent that he was in a spiritual slumber of sorts, one where he wasn’t diligently pursuing Christ and consistently reading the word given to him by God.”⁷⁵ Another one added, “A result of this slumber was that Christian almost lacked the necessary sustenance the scroll usually gave him because he basically ignored it for the entire time of his sleep. Thus, the scroll was lost in his time of need.”⁷⁶ And,

The fact that it took Christian some time to realize it was gone teaches us that from a spiritual slumber comes a spiritual stupor of the mind, where we are not constantly at our guard and conscious of the power of the word of God. We may forget things, and often forget how necessary the word of God is to our walk with him and the life and sustenance it brings.⁷⁷

Another memorable scene in *Pilgrim’s Progress* is the point at which the pilgrim reaches “Doubting Castle” which is guarded by the “Giant of Despair.” Thankfully, Christian possesses a key that will lead to the way out. The students were asked, “What

74. *Pilgrim’s Progress* third stage, Wordsearch Bible Software.

75. Student one, female, junior, Theology II, *Pilgrim’s Progress* third stage, February 25, 2015.

76. Student two, male, sophomore, Theology II, *Pilgrim’s Progress* third stage, February 25, 2015.

77. Student three, female, junior, Theology II, *Pilgrim’s Progress* third stage, February 25, 2015.

does the key represent that unlocked the door to Doubting Castle, and what does it look like in the Christian life?" Their responses speak of the encouragement and power found in the promises of God: "The key represents the promises of Christ in our life! We have each been given key just like this one that can free us from any bondage of the enemy that we might face. Christ already paid the price to free us from the Doubting Castle; we just have to walk in the promises that He has given us."⁷⁸ Another stated, "Today we have trouble recognizing the immense power of promise. This illustration that Bunyan used is just genius! We sit and wallow in our troubles so often while we have the way out of them with us the whole time!"⁷⁹ Another comment was, "A key is just a paperweight if we never realize we have to actually stick it in a door for it to be of any use. We have to realize that the problems we face on a daily basis can be easily solved through what Christ already did in our lives!"⁸⁰

Church Fathers

For the Theology III course, selected writings from the Church Fathers were used to bring students into dialogue with our early Christian heritage.⁸¹ There were multiple question prompts, followed by rich discussion about texts from ten different early stalwarts of the faith.⁸² The depth of their spirituality and the sacrifices that marked

78. Student one, female, sophomore, Theology II, *Pilgrim's Progress* seventh stage, March 27, 2015.

79. Student two, female, junior, Theology II, *Pilgrim's Progress* seventh stage, March 27, 2015.

80. Student three, male, sophomore, Theology II, *Pilgrim's Progress* seventh stage, March 27, 2015.

81. Bryan Liftin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers: An Evangelical Introduction*, (Ada, MI: Brazos Press, 2007).

82. These ten Church Fathers were Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons, Tertullian, Perpetua, Origen, Athanasius, John Chrysostom, Augustine, and Cyril of Alexandria.

their lives served to inspire and challenge the students. This section will show only a small portion of our course discussions.

When considering Justin Martyr, the students were asked about the concept of “spermatic Logos” and how it relates to the possibility of salvation for those who were born prior to the arrival of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Could people be saved apart from the Jewish faith or an encounter with the Old Testament?

One student offered, “I could believe that there may have been a special grace in that period of time for those who just did not know. Then again, Paul later in Romans chapter 1 says that none are without excuse because of natural revelation. So this is quite the perplexing problem indeed.”⁸³ Another student countered concerning what Paul stated in Romans by adding, “If men can be condemned because of the rejection of these things then why can they not be saved because of the acceptance of these things?”⁸⁴

The Old Testament stories of the patriarchs *before* God gave Moses the Law were used as an example by some students, including this one:

If we consider that individuals such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and many more both before and after them were saved outside of following the Law, which they did not have, then others most certainly could be saved by the same thing which saved these men – faith. Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. Thus, if salvation could be granted to Abraham, outside of the Law, then it could certainly be granted to others as well.⁸⁵

83. Student one, male, senior, Theo III, Church Fathers, October 17, 2015.

84. Student two, female, senior, Theo III, Church Fathers, October 17, 2015.

85. Student three, male, junior, Theo III, Church Fathers, October 17, 2015.

One student pointed out an example from C. S. Lewis during the discussion, indicating that some gentiles are certainly closer to truth than others:

Similar to C. S. Lewis's idea in *Mere Christianity*, there are some religions that are not right like Christianity is, but get closer than others. Lewis uses the example of a math equation, in which some answers are completely wrong, while others are only off by a simple step. Other philosophers and religions are similar to a wrong math answer, but they still point to the right answer.⁸⁶

Church Father Irenaeus gave counsel for dealing with theological differences and disagreements. He acknowledged that different Christian groups could "agree to disagree" concerning some practices but should hold firm to the most important doctrines. The students were then asked what they thought would be most crucial: theological truth or unity, or perhaps both.

The first student answered, "Ultimately sound doctrine is more important. There is a give and take to both sides, because if you have perfect unity but everyone is following a core doctrine that is ultimately heretical, then what is the point of having unity? At that point, you fail to follow Christ." Another countered with an interesting thought that unity itself is a theological truth:

Without being steadfast in our own theology, we could easily be swayed by false doctrines and break free from the unity we may have once held in the body. Thus, unity is essential. Not only is it our own prerogative to understand our individual doctrines, but also the body can aid in building such doctrines up. In other words, the body provides accountability and support. Therefore, unity is of paramount note - because it both connects us to like-minded doctrinal individuals and also ultimately aids in advancing the kingdom. The two serve in a symbiotic relationship. One does not go without the other. In its simplest notion, unity is a theological truth.⁸⁷

86. Student four, female, senior, Theo III, Church Fathers, October 17, 2015.

87. Student five, male, senior, Theo III, Church Fathers, October 17, 2015.

Another student mentioned that there was a spiritual need for both theological truth and unity,

There is a spiritual need for truth and for unity. The body is meant to be one. However, the nature of the church today with its countless denominations makes this difficult. Some sort of unity can be achieved though if we do a few things. Realizing what is the difference between a theological truth and scruples or matters of much less importance can help us to understand that we are not as different from other types of Christians as we think we are.⁸⁸

One of the greatest defenders of classical orthodoxy was Athanasius. He famously contended and battled heretics to ensure that essential doctrines, such as that of the Trinity, would be taught. The students were asked, in light of the travails of Athanasius, if the doctrine of the Trinity was worth preserving and contending for today, or if it could instead be something on which Christians can disagree about. Without exception, every student was resolved in their defense of the doctrine of the Trinity:

Without a proper doctrine of the Godhead many subsequent doctrines and theological standpoints break down. For instance, taking the Son, Jesus Christ out of the Godhead removes the redemption of humanity from possibility. Because God stepped down from Heaven and in His spotless and pure nature He was able to pay Himself as the ransom for our life everlasting. The Trinity is unavoidably a Scriptural truth.⁸⁹

Another stated, "The doctrine of the Trinity is an aspect of Christianity which I firmly believe is not only worth 'defending' today, but is vital, necessary, and part of the very foundations of our Christian faith."⁹⁰ Additionally, "If any person of the Trinity is neglected, a major part of Christian spirituality and religion is lost. If we ignore the person of Jesus Christ, we will have an improper view of salvation; Christ's atoning work

88. Student six, female, senior, Theo III, Church Fathers, October 17, 2015.

89. Student six, male, senior, Theo III, Church Fathers, November 6, 2015.

90. Student seven, female, junior, Theo III, Church Fathers, November 6, 2015.

loses much of its significance. If the Holy Spirit is ignored, we miss out on the vital roles He plays in our lives every day.”⁹¹

Plato’s *Republic*

The First Year Experience course for honors students provided an opportunity for freshmen to explore Plato’s ageless classic, *The Republic*. This work was the only classic without explicit Christian ties to be utilized in the project. Regardless, the depth of the work encouraged students to wrestle with some interesting concepts, including what Plato considers “the noble lie” necessary in order to create a just society. This society would consist of three broad groups of citizens: bronze, silver, and gold. While considering the kind of community that Plato argues should be developed, the students were asked why such a lie might be necessary, and if, in fact, it could be noble. Why would it be important that the “Noble Lie” be embraced by the state’s inhabitants?

The students responded in various ways:

While it would be nice for people to agree to go into certain categories of society and work together for a common good, it is simply not possible to achieve because of corrupt natures. The gold ruling class, in not all, but many cases, will use their power for their own personal greed and ambition. There will be very little times where true wisdom and humility will come into play.⁹²

Another added, “All citizens must continue to believe that they are born of the same mother, the earth, and therefore all a part of the same family. Unfortunately, with such a delicate system the State risks its entire structure on the hope that no individual will

91. Student eight, female, senior, Theo III, Church Fathers, November 6, 2015.

92. Student one, male, freshman, First Year Experience, September 24, 2015.

tap into his philosophical self.”⁹³ Additionally, one student shared a relevant passage of Scripture from 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12: “For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they would believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.”⁹⁴

Holy Bible

The Bible will always be considered the greatest of the Great Books. The Life Formation course focused its core content on the spiritual disciplines and how they assist in spiritual formation. Students were required to keep written reflection journals in which they answered questions. The journal reflective-writing assignments were then followed up with classroom discussion around some of these questions. For example, when examining the theme of solitude, students were asked to consider the life of Jacob: “Considering Jacob’s character, why was it appropriate for God to appear as a wrestler to Jacob?”⁹⁵

The students responded in various ways: “Because he was wrestling in his head about what he had done to his brother and God needed to show him who was in true control. Even when Jacob won, He displaced his hip once again showing Jacob that He is in control.”⁹⁶ Another said, “I think God uses irony and this is an example of that. Jacob needed to be faced in a way that would challenge his pride. The fact that Jacob had to

93. Student two, female, freshman, First Year Experience, September 24, 2015.

94. Student three, female, freshman, First Year Experience, September 24, 2015.

95. Jan Johnson, *Spiritual Disciplines Companion: Bible Studies and Practices to Transform Your Soul*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2009), 21.

96. Student one, male, freshman, Life Formation, January 27, 2016.

wrestle through the whole night challenged his commitment to this blessing while he was known to be a man who did not commit.”⁹⁷ Another commented, “Jacob was stubborn and manipulative. A wrestler appearing to him would shake someone like him up enough for him to truly be touched rather than just someone talking to him. It was appropriate for God to appear to him as a wrestler because Jacob was being prepared to go into battle.”⁹⁸

Another question asked students to reflect on the important discipline of solitude. The students were asked, “How did God use solitude to transform Jacob’s soul? In what ways do you hope the practice of solitude might change you?”⁹⁹ Various responses included, “He used solitude to change Jacob’s heart from being focused on earthly things to being more focused on the gracious life he should be leading and he also gave Jacob some guilt for what he did to Esau.”¹⁰⁰ Another suggested, “God had to get Jacob’s attention from a one-on-one moment. God would not have been able to present himself how he did if Jacob had not been in solitude. God reaffirmed his Lordship in Jacob’s solitude.” One more added, “God helped Jacob understand himself and his character, it’s like the saying “tell me who you hang with and I’ll tell you who are,” as God would reveal little bits of Jacob’s character and parts he didn’t approve, or wanted to change/work on.”¹⁰¹

97. Student two, female, freshman, Life Formation, January 27, 2016.

98. Student three, female, freshman, Life Formation, January 27, 2016.

99. Johnson, *Spiritual Disciplines Companion*, 22.

100. Student four, female, freshman, Life Formation, March 23, 2016.

101. Student five, female, freshman, Life Formation, March 23, 2016.

It should also be noted that the *Holy Bible* was the chief Great Book in all of the elective chapels and each seated semester course. Each class and conversation included biblical themes, quotes, and ideas and served as the basis for every final conclusion.

The above examples provide a short survey of some of the discussions that were part of this project, which utilized the Great Books as source material for the classroom and questions as the chief methodology to probe the texts. The texts were examined not only for informational purposes, but to invite students to challenge themselves spiritually, to gain deeper understanding, to grow, and to enter into an intentional formation process. Many of the additional questions used in this project are listed in an appendix.

Peer Analysis And Feedback

I was extremely pleased to have three faculty members present with me for the initial venture with the Great Books methodology during the elective chapel time. Their feedback and perspectives on the learning environment were particularly beneficial to the overall process and experience for our students. One of the members, Dr. Todd Guevin, Professor of Arts and Sciences, also served on UVF's Honors Committee with me and offered this assessment as the Great Books elective chapel was launched:

I like the topic, method and your style of guiding the group. I really appreciate you putting this together. I am looking forward to the next session. I am learning the format and still have questions. Is there a limit to how much one person should speak? If there is, how does one regulate a large group without impeding the flow? Were we to only ask questions or do we make statements as well? We have some pontificating students that seem to enjoy their own voices too much, and their contribution so far is not great, but it is only the first day. We also

have some really thoughtful students that I would like to hear more from. I suppose this is typical of any group discussion. I wish it were a smaller group of people who had more to contribute. How do we increase the quality of the contributions students make? Perhaps this will just take time. It was interesting to see that we had so many students who were hungry for this type of topic. We filled the room. This is a statement to our college about the importance students place on this type of experience. Reading the Canto out loud seemed to work. At least we know everyone had read it once. Maybe we can email out a link to the Letter to Can Grande (hope I got this right) that you mentioned or any other advanced reading for those who are interested.¹⁰²

Dr. Guevin's analysis highlighted some concerns that I also noted during our first gathering. First, we had too many people to allow for a proper "fit" to the methodology. It would be necessary to find an adequate way of addressing the challenge that the attendance presented us without dampening the excitement that had been generated. Secondly, I knew that I needed to encourage some students to speak more while also encouraging others to speak less. Finding a proper balance here would be crucial for future meetings. As a result, I changed the layout of the classroom so that those seating at the inner tables could freely share in the discussion without constantly raising their hands. Others, seated at the outer tables would have to raise their hands if they wanted their voices to be brought into the discussion.

I also received feedback from Dr. Kevin Beery, our UVF Academic Dean when this project was initiated, who was curious as to how the initial meeting would turn out. He graciously noted:

I so enjoyed it. I am convinced this is something VFCC desperately needs. Thanks for being willing to spearhead this effort. I did manage to download the real thing and look forward to the next elective chapel. I would love to hear your take on the free flow of the conversation. Are

102. Todd Guevin, email message to author, UVF, Phoenixville, PA, August 30, 2013.

you pleased? Is it supposed to work like that? I must confess it got pretty deep for me at times.¹⁰³

Dr. Beery had not previously been introduced to the methodology, and he confessed to me that he “wasn’t much of a fan” of poetry, but that he would support our efforts. To have the support of the Academic Dean would be crucial to the ongoing success of this endeavor. I then responded to Drs. Guevin and Beery with the following note addressing some of their questions:

Thanks for the constructive feedback. I was happy to see a solid group for our first meeting, though the methodology suffers if the group is too large. As you can see, our group was larger and poses significant challenges, some of which you alluded to. We could consider breaking the group up into two, but not sure that we would be able to maintain momentum that way. We would ultimately lose those who are looking for something else as the semester progresses, in my opinion. But, maybe we could create an inner and outer circle...the inner circle would be for those who were more serious, and we could draft a rule if someone talks too much, we could bounce them out of the first circle and allow someone on the outer ring to enter the fray. These sessions work the best when they retain a dialectical spirit: pose a question/thesis, followed by an antithesis, followed by a synthesis....and then repeat with another question, etc. One interrogates the text with questions to see what the author is saying, which is really not all that dissimilar to the scientific method. Start with a hypothesis and then test it out....except in the Great Books we use questions instead of test tubes and petri dishes.¹⁰⁴

Another colleague, Dr. David Dippold, Department Chair of the UVF Church Ministries Department and active participant in our elective chapel gatherings, provided a thoughtful analysis and assessment of the methodology.

If I understand the concept correctly the Great Books methodology consists of having the author speak and the reader listen. The author in a sense becomes the professor and we all engage as students or learners. I think the methodology is very helpful in that: 1) It focuses on the author

103. Kevin Beery, email message to author, UVF, Phoenixville, PA, August 30, 2013.

104. Mark MacLean, email response to feedback, UVF, Phoenixville, PA, August 31, 2013.

first authorial intent. I would hold that all good hermeneutics starts with the role of the author first. This methodology certainly endorses and re-enforces this concept. 2) It helps the reader know his/her part in the process, namely as listener and reflector. The reader gets to listen to the author and then reflect on both what the author said and how the reader might respond to the author's meaning. 3) It helps all students know that ultimately we are all 'learners' or 'students' and that even professors must take the role of the student/listener to continue the learning and maturing process. 4) It ensures active learning not passive listening or observing. The method requires one to personally engage with the material. I would think that these concepts would be very helpful in spiritual formation. Part of spiritual formation should involve listening to the Word of God, written (Bible) and living (Jesus). This listening is necessary for all on the spiritual journey. The methodology ensures that there is one true teacher (Jesus/God) and that we are all disciples/students (though we may be at different stages on the journey). The methodology also ensures that we are active disciples, not passive observers in following God/the discipleship process.¹⁰⁵

Following the completion of each elective chapel or semester-long class, a detailed evaluation of the overall format and success of the particular chapel or class was conducted using course surveys. Many students were also interviewed. These students submitted additional written material that provided reflection on their experience and on their spiritual formation. The collective data will be analyzed and evaluated in the final chapter of this project to determine if or how spiritual formation occurred using this pedagogical approach.

105. David Dippold, email message to author, UVF, Phoenixville, PA, August 30, 2013.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS

Introduction

This project provided an opportunity to coordinate and evaluate a unique academic experiment that involved using questions emerging from the Great Books model as a chief pedagogical tool in the classroom. To test and explore the effectiveness of this approach in encouraging positive spiritual formation, I employed a combination of research methodologies: surveys, descriptive research via selected interviews, and evaluative research comparing the elective chapels with the semester-long courses.

The primary tool used to evaluate the role of questions in spiritual formation utilizing this Great Books pedagogy was a survey containing thirty-one questions.¹ The surveys were given at the close of a course or at the end of a series of elective chapels. It was similar to a class evaluation, but the questions focused on matters relating to this project. The students' answers were then recorded and analyzed in order to determine whether the approach produced positive, neutral, or negative results.

The survey posed a series of questions to the elective chapel participants as well as students from the relevant classes in order to compile feedback specific to this author's hypothesis. Their answers helped to determine the effect of implementing questions and the Great Books in the students' spiritual formation. Without this important data regarding each student's personal experience and evaluation, this thesis-

1. See Appendix D, Great Book Class / Elective Chapel Survey.

project: *“Dialectical Discipleship: Exploring the Role of Questions in Spiritual Formation Utilizing a ‘Great Books’ Pedagogy”* could not be completed.

Secondly, a smaller group of these same students were asked to provide additional feedback to provide further clarity and insight on the effectiveness or non-effectiveness of this methodology. A dialog with some key contributors in the form of interviews is included after the survey data analysis below.

Finally, the results of the surveys and student interviews made it possible to compare and contrast the elective chapel samples with the seated course samples. The elective chapels are more voluntary in nature, as students are free to come and go week-to-week. The seated courses are semester-long affairs which require student participation for the duration of the course. I was curious to see what sort of impact this difference in setting would have on the students’ responses.

Survey Research

The survey contained thirty-one questions and was given a total of eight different times, one for each class/elective chapel included in the project.² The survey was filled out a total of two hundred and seventy-nine times across all sections. Each student’s answer was assigned a numeric value, and then a class average was computed based on these numeric values, so that the author could assess the impact on the class/elective chapel’s overall evaluation of that particular question. Refer to the

2. See Appendix D.

following figures for a key and for the final survey analysis.

Use this key when referencing the Survey Results table below.

Elective Chapels:

E1 = Elective Chapel One – 43 students (*Dante's Divine Comedy – Inferno*)

E2 = Elective Chapel Two – 41 students (*Dante's Divine Comedy – Purgatorio/Paradiso*)

E3 = Elective Chapel Three – 46 students (*C.S. Lewis' Screwtape Letters*)

ALL E (All Elective Chapel surveys) = 130 students

Seated Courses:

TH 1 = Theology One – 39 students (*Augustine's Confessions*)

TH 2 = Theology Two – 34 students (*John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress*)

TH 3 = Theology Three – 32 students (*Church Father selections*)

FYE = First Year Experience – 11 students (*Plato's Republic*)

LF = Life Formation – 33 students (*Holy Bible*)

ALL S (All Seated Course surveys) = 149 students

Overall total surveys = 279 students

Figure 5: Survey Key

Survey Question	Elective Chapel(s) or Seated Class(es)											Survey	Average Answer range	Result
	E1	E2	E3	ALL E	TH1	TH2	TH3	LF	FYE	ALL S	Average			
1	1.98	2.49	2.40	2.29	1.90	2.38	2.44	2.61	1.64	2.19	2.24	Only a little (2)	Expected	
2	2.88	2.98	2.83	2.90	2.74	2.97	2.91	2.97	2.82	2.88	2.89	Only a little (2) > Yes (3)	Positive	
3	3.70	3.73	3.67	3.70	3.54	3.74	3.74	3.69	3.52	4.00	3.70	Somewhat (3) - Definitely (4)	Positive	
4	5.26	4.98	4.91	5.05	4.90	4.97	4.91	4.94	5.27	5.00	5.02	More (5)	Very Positive	
5	5.14	5.00	4.91	5.02	4.77	5.18	4.84	4.67	5.27	4.95	4.98	More (5)	Very Positive	
6	4.14	4.15	4.17	4.15	4.00	4.53	4.50	4.12	4.55	4.34	4.25	Somewhat more (4)	Positive	
7	5.44	5.25	5.09	5.26	5.03	5.24	5.41	5.12	5.64	5.28	5.27	More (5)	Very Positive	
8	4.26	4.46	3.83	4.18	4.21	4.21	3.97	4.59	5.09	4.41	4.30	Somewhat more (4) - More (5)	Positive	
9	4.16	4.45	3.83	4.15	4.51	5.15	5.28	4.79	4.73	4.89	4.52	Somewhat more (4) - More (5)	Positive	
10	5.12	4.76	4.49	4.79	4.69	4.79	4.66	4.76	5.27	4.83	4.81	Somewhat more (4) - More (5)	Positive	
11	3.67	2.71	3.47	3.28	5.13	5.18	4.97	4.91	5.64	5.16	4.22	More than half (4) - Most (5)	Positive	
12	2.33	2.00	1.85	2.06	3.91	3.85	3.68	3.68	4.18	3.86	2.96	Announcement (3)	Neutral	
13	3.55	2.94	3.96	3.48	3.05	3.11	2.67	4.04	3.14	3.20	3.34	New Experience (3)	Positive	
14	5.49	5.46	5.20	5.38	4.82	4.56	4.59	4.79	5.36	4.82	5.10	More (5)	Very Positive	
15	5.21	5.22	4.83	5.08	5.03	4.97	4.81	4.82	5.45	5.02	5.05	More (5)	Very Positive	
16	5.40	5.46	5.31	5.39	5.05	5.09	5.13	4.94	5.64	5.17	5.28	More (5)	Very Positive	
17	4.81	4.95	4.83	4.86	4.91	4.78	4.60	3.87	4.27	4.49	4.67	Junior (4) - Senior (5)	Neutral	
18	1.43	1.59	1.89	1.64	2.10	2.21	2.10	2.00	1.18	1.92	1.78	Info only question		
19	4.81	4.83	4.57	4.74	4.56	4.82	4.91	4.61	5.27	4.83	4.79	Somewhat More (4) - More (5)	Positive	
20	4.28	4.22	3.91	4.14	4.41	4.62	4.63	4.76	4.73	4.63	4.38	Somewhat More (4) - More (5)	Positive	
21	4.47	4.61	4.43	4.50	4.72	4.62	4.75	4.73	5.09	4.78	4.64	Somewhat More (4) - More (5)	Positive	
22	4.79	4.76	4.74	4.76	4.90	4.94	4.94	4.76	5.55	5.02	4.89	Somewhat more (4) - More (5)	Positive	
23	3.49	3.46	3.65	3.53	3.87	3.79	3.78	4.30	4.91	4.13	3.83	Neutral (3) - Somewhat More (4)	Neutral	
24	4.21	4.44	4.28	4.31	4.38	4.53	4.50	4.70	5.09	4.64	4.48	Somewhat More (4) - More (5)	Positive	
25	4.51	4.71	4.33	4.52	4.51	4.65	4.63	4.85	5.18	4.76	4.64	Somewhat More (4) - More (5)	Positive	
26	4.77	4.51	4.07	4.45	4.23	4.26	4.13	4.42	5.00	4.41	4.43	Somewhat more (4) - More (5)	Positive	
27	4.65	4.56	4.26	4.49	4.44	4.47	4.41	4.73	5.55	4.72	4.60	Somewhat More (4) - More (5)	Positive	
28	4.77	4.71	4.46	4.64	4.54	4.24	4.56	4.48	5.45	4.66	4.65	Somewhat More (4) - More (5)	Positive	
29	5.02	5.02	4.70	4.91	4.62	4.71	4.63	4.58	5.55	4.81	4.86	Somewhat More (4) - More (5)	Positive	
30	5.67	5.49	5.46	5.54	5.10	5.21	5.16	4.85	5.55	5.17	5.36	More (5) - Much More (6)	Very Positive	
31	1.21	1.05	1.34	1.20	1.71	1.30	1.50	1.70	1.00	1.44	1.32	More (1)	Positive	

Figure 6: Survey Results

Results By Question

Question 1. Assessing Previous Dialectical Approach Exposure

Students who were part of this project had varying degrees of previous exposure to dialectical approaches to learning. The students were asked, “Did you have an understanding of/appreciation for the Great Books format when you began attending this class/Elective Chapel?” They were presented with three possible answers: not really (1), only a little (2), or yes (3). Each answer was assigned an increasing numerical value from 1 through 3. The average of the sum of all the answers from the class/Elective Chapel, provided the average response of 2.24.

The first elective chapel, the first seated course, and the freshman First Year Experience course all predictably scored lower on this question, as the format was being offered for the first time.³ Returning students to this format scored higher overall, with the elective chapels scoring slightly higher than the seated courses.⁴ These scores were expected, and when averaged, the most common answer to this first question was closest to “only a little.”

Question 2: Understanding Of/Appreciation For The Great Books Format

The next question logically follows after participating in this format. The students were asked to evaluate: “I have an understanding of/appreciation for the Great Books format after attending this class/elective chapel?” They were again offered three

3. Survey question 1: cumulative average by elective chapel: Dante’s *Inferno*: 1.98; Theology I (Augustine’s *Confessions*): 1.90; Plato’s *Republic*: 1.64.

4. Survey question 1: all elective chapels: 2.29; all seated courses: 2.19; overall average: 2.24.

options for responses: not really (1), only a little (2), or yes (3). The survey data affirmed that students grasped the process with their responses significantly higher than the previous question.⁵ This positive outcome indicated that the students had a greater understanding or appreciation for the format, although this particular statement is neutral concerning any spiritual benefits of the methodology.

Question 3: Rate Opportunity For Personal Involvement In Classroom Discussion

The survey next asked the students to consider this statement: “I see this class/elective chapel as an opportunity to be more personally involved in class discussion and/or learning.” Students were offered four responses: not really (1), only a little (2), somewhat (3), or definitely (4). The responses were positive across the board. The highest overall score was tabulated in the First Year Experience course using Plato’s *Republic* as the Great Book during the course. This course had the smallest sample size at eleven students, but they were unanimous with their answer. Each one responded with “definitely” (4), providing very strong evidence that they were more personally involved in class discussion. The other class/elective chapel sections offered positive responses as well.⁶

Question 4: Learning Something Not Learned In A Traditionally-Taught Class

The next question sought to discern if students were able to learn something

5. Survey question 2: Dante’s *Purgatory*: 2.98; Theology II (*Pilgrim’s Progress*): 2.97; all elective chapels: 2.90; all seated courses: 2.88; overall: 2.89.

6. Survey question 3: all elective chapels: 3.70; all seated courses: 3.70; overall: 3.70.

that they might not have learned in a standard class. They were asked to respond to the following statement, “I was able to learn something that I may not have learned in a traditionally-taught class.” They were given six options to choose from with numerical values assigned to each response.⁷ Both seated and elective chapel scores were quite high, providing an average response of “more” than a traditionally-taught class (5.02).⁸ This was an exciting result and provided a source of encouragement and motivation for the author to continue the project.

Question 5: Understanding The Reading Materials

The reading materials were a unique facet of this project, so the following survey question lead to some useful data. The students were asked to respond to the question, “I have gained a deeper understanding of the class reading materials.” The responses were once again encouraging, as the overall average landed in the “more” category (4.98). Interestingly, the lowest course score for this question was given by the students in Life Formation, which utilizes the Bible as the Great Book for its readings.⁹ Even though it was the lowest score across all chapels and courses (4.67), it still ranked favorably.

7. These were the six options for this question on the survey: Not at all/less (1) Somewhat less (2) Neutral (3) Somewhat more (4) More (5) Much more (6). These six options and their numerical values were utilized for the remainder of the survey with a couple of minor exceptions.

8. Survey question 4: all elective chapels: 5.05; all seated courses: 5.00; overall: 5.02.

9. Survey question 5: Life Formation: 4.67; all elective chapels: 5.02; all seated courses: 4.95; overall: 4.98.

Question 6: Student's Contribution

The next survey question probed whether or not the dialectical method allowed the students to feel that their contributions were meaningful. They were asked to respond to the statement, "I was able to contribute in a meaningful way." The responses were again positive on the whole, with the overall average landing in the "somewhat more" range (4.25). The seated courses ranked higher with this question, perhaps because the elective chapel students weren't required or expected to share anything if they chose not to, nor were there any grades assigned for the elective chapel participation.¹⁰

Questions 7: Role of Questions

I also queried the students as to their opinions concerning the meaningfulness of questions in the role of conversation. They were asked to respond to the statement, "Questions play a significant role in encouraging meaningful conversation." Every course and elective chapel strongly affirmed this statement with an answer greater than "more" (5.27). The highest and lowest scores were theology courses.¹¹

Question 8: Inspiration To Pursue Further Discussion/Reading/Research

The students were asked to respond to a statement inquiring about whether or not they carried on the discussion outside of the class or elective chapel: "I was inspired

10. Survey question 6: all elective chapels: 4.15; all seated courses: 4.34; overall: 4.25.

11. Survey question 7: Theology III (Church Fathers): 5.41; Theology I (Augustine's *Confessions*): 5.03; all elective chapels: 5.26; all seated courses: 5.28; overall: 5.27.

to do further discussion, reading and/or research outside of class.” The elective chapels responded lower than the seated courses, with C.S. Lewis’ *Screwtape Letters* receiving the lowest score (3.83) and Plato’s *Republic* scoring the highest (5.09) for this query.¹²

Question 9: Complete Reading Material

Students also rated their ability to complete the required reading by answering the following statement: “I was able to complete the required reading.” Overall, the students did complete their required reading (4.52).

Question 10: Interest Level In Different Teaching Style

Regarding the different style of teaching and subsequent learning a dialectical method offers, the students were asked to respond to this statement, “My interest level changed in regards to the material due to the different style of teaching/learning.” Both seated courses and elective chapels scored similarly, with Dante’s *Inferno* (5.12) and Plato’s *Republic* receiving the highest scores in their respective categories (5.27).¹³

Question 11: Attendance

Students were asked a general question about their attendance: “Please indicate how many class meetings/elective chapels you were able to attend.” The results were

12. Survey question 8: Elective chapel (*Screwtape Letters*): 3.83; First Year Experience (*The Republic*): 5.09; all elective chapels: 4.18; all seated courses: 4.41; overall: 4.30.

13. Survey question 10: Elective chapel (Dante’s *Inferno*): 5.12; First Year Experience (*The Republic*): 5.27; all elective chapels: 4.79; all seated courses: 4.83; overall: 4.81.

what I had expected, with an average of 4.22, “more than half” to “most.” A student’s increasing desire to attend class/elective chapel would result in greater opportunities for him or her to experience this unique classroom format.

Question 12: Where Students Heard About The Class/Elective Chapel

This question could not be rated, as it was not a cumulative question but one about marketing materials and/or word of mouth “advertising.” The choices were “student recommendation,” “email,” “announcement,” “class catalog,” and “other.” The “student recommendation” and “announcement” appeared to be the best forms of marketing for the elective chapels, while “announcement” and “class catalog” were the most common answers for the students attending classes, understandably.

Question 13: Most Interesting Aspect

This question also could not be analyzed based on a cumulative average. The students were asked to choose what aspect of the class/elective chapel intrigued them: “What interested you most about attending this class/elective chapel?” The answers provided were “format,” “teacher,” “new experience,” “text,” “opportunity to learn,” and “other.” The score of 3, “new experience,” was the most frequent answer. It was encouraging to see that students were attracted to the experience and curious about what it was all about.

Question 14: Desire To Attend Additional *Great Books* Class/Elective Chapel

I wanted to see if the students would be interested in additional future elective chapels or seated courses featuring the Great Books. The next statement students were asked to evaluate was, “I would be likely to attend another class/elective chapel based on the Great Books format.” The elective chapels scored higher than the seated courses, but each section responded positively.¹⁴

Question 15: Impact On Educational Experience

Students were then asked about the educational significance of the Great Books experience. Students responded to the statement, “I feel that this class/elective chapel has added significantly to my educational experience at UVF.” The overall average score for this question was favorable (5.05 – “More”).¹⁵ I considered this answer to be of special significance, because I felt that the positive response to this statement validated the model and helped to justify adding the option of a Great Books experience to the various learning environments (elective chapel and seated courses) of UVF. The students said “yes!”

Question 16: Students’ Recommendation

Next, students were asked if they would recommend the Great Books experience to others: “I would recommend this Great Books class/elective chapel to other

14. Survey question 14: all elective chapels: 5.38; all seated courses: 4.82; overall: 5.10.

15. Survey question 15: all elective chapels: 5.08; all seated courses: 5.02; overall: 5.05.

students.” This response to this question generated one of the highest scores in the survey (5.28).¹⁶ A positive encounter with the Great Books and the Shared Inquiry methodology suggested a healthy level of student satisfaction with (and enjoyment in) the overall process.

Question 17: Students Who Might Benefit

This question was one without a numerical score. It asked: “Students who would benefit most from this Great Books class/elective chapel are:” The choices included “freshman,” “sophomore,” “junior,” “senior,” “all,” and “none.” Juniors and seniors were the most recommended.

Question 18: Who Wants More Info?

This question was for information purposes only. The students indicated if they would sign up for receiving more info on future opportunities: “I would like to receive information about future Great Books classes/elective chapels.” The options were, “Yes, sign me up – I loved it,” “No, I have had enough,” “Maybe,” and “I’m graduating.”

Question 19: Rate Your Motivation

The students were asked to compare their motivation for reading in the Great Books learning environment with their motivation for reading in other classes. The

16. Survey question 16: overall 5.28. The only question with a higher score was question 30, which asked if the Great Books experience was an overall asset to the University (5.36).

survey presented the statement: “I experienced greater motivation to read the material assigned in this Great Books class/elective chapel compared to traditionally-taught classes/chapels.” The students responded positively across each class and elective chapel that their motivation to read the material was indeed greater in a Great Books setting (4.79 – “somewhat more” to “more”).¹⁷

Question 20: Careful Reflection/Study

The reflective nature of a Great Books setting was alluded to with the following responsive statement: “I did more careful reflection/study for the Great Books class/elective chapel.” The highest score for this question appeared in the Life Formation course which used the *Holy Bible* (4.76, closer to “more”) as its primary text. Slightly lower scores were given for each of the elective chapels (4.14, closer to “somewhat more”); this may be explained at least in part by the fact that the readings for chapel were done together during the weekly meeting time and were not associated with any reflective writing which was required in the seated courses.¹⁸

Question 21: Evaluating Personal Spiritual Growth

When asked if a Great Books experience in class or elective chapel had an effect on their spiritual growth, the students again responded favorably. They were asked to respond to this statement, “I believe that I experienced personal spiritual growth while

17. Survey question 19: all elective chapels: 4.74; all seated courses: 4.83; overall: 4.79.

18. Survey question 20: all elective chapels: 4.14; all seated courses: 4.63; overall: 4.38.

taking this Great Books class/elective chapel.” The seated courses scored higher on average than the elective chapels, but all of the scores were very positive (4.64 overall, closer to “more”).

Ironically, the one seated course which scored the highest was the First Year Experience which utilized Plato’s *Republic* as the Great Book (5.09).¹⁹ This result was a bit curious to me, as the *Republic* is not a Christian text, yet it was utilized in the class which produced the highest score in response to this survey question. Perhaps there were other factors besides the text that assisted with this scoring. Could it be related to the overall nature of the class setting itself, which tends to be a bit more laid back than traditional classes and allows for additional voices to be shared, including one’s own? Another possibility is that, because the issues that Great Books raise are universal and therefore relatable to readers across cultures, students of these texts are able to apply what they learn generally to what they know individually. Plato’s long discussion of what goodness is in the *Republic* is a good example of something a Christian might be able to relate to; Plato’s position on the form of “the Good” has long been considered compatible with Christianity. In any case, it is difficult to explain this result with certainty, so further questions were also explored.

Question 22: Insight From Personal Reflection

Another question alluding to the effectiveness of personal reflection was phrased this way, “I gained insight from my own personal reflection on the reading

19. Survey question 21: all elective chapels: 4.50; all seated courses: 4.78; overall: 4.64.

assignments/discussions that took place in the Great Books class/elective chapel.” The results for this question also scored well into the positive category in both seated and elective chapel settings (overall average 4.89, close to “more”).²⁰ Although this question was similar to survey question 20, the survey data shows that the overall results for this specific question were higher than the previous question (4.89 vs. 4.38).²¹

Questions 23 and 24: Impact On Relationships With God and Others

The next two survey questions relate to the two great commandments of Jesus Christ: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:37-40). The students were first asked if their relationships with others were affected by their learning in a Great Books setting: “My relationships with friends/family/colleagues changed during this Great Books class/elective chapel.” The seated courses yielded a significantly higher score than the elective chapels for this survey question. Of note, though, is the fact that the overall average was lower than many of the other questions.²²

I also believed it important to ask the students if their relationship with God was influenced positively by a Great Books experience. They responded to the following statement, “My relationship with God experienced a positive change during this Great

20. Survey question 22: all elective chapels: 4.76; all seated courses: 5.02; overall: 4.89.

21. Survey question 22 compared with question 20: all elective chapels: 4.14/4.76; all seated courses: 5.02/4.63; overall: 4.89/4.38.

22. Survey question 23: all elective chapels: 3.53; all seated courses: 4.91; overall: 3.83.

Books class/elective chapel.” The students responded more favorably to this question, which relates to the greatest commandment (love God), than they did to the previous question, which relates more to the second commandment (love others).²³ I was hoping to see a closer correlation between these two survey questions, as one’s love for God should also flow into our love for others, but the data did not reveal a parallel. Both questions still provided a positive net gain, however, in regards to the students’ experience in a Great Books setting.

Question 25: Openness To Other Points of View

The students were also asked, “I am more willing to discuss other points of view after taking this Great Books class/elective chapel.” The spiritual discipline of listening is essential to spiritual formation, and hearing and processing additional viewpoints certainly can assist growth in this manner. The students responded favorably, with the seated courses edging out the elective chapels for the higher score (4.76 vs. 4.52).²⁴

Question 27: Additional Questions

When asked, “I thought of additional questions I wanted to ask during the Great Books class/elective chapel,” the students again responded favorably. This is an important part of a dialectical conversation and shows at least that the students were actively involved in the process. The top-scoring course was the First Year Experience

23. Survey question 24 compared with 23: all elective chapels: 4.31/3.53; all seated courses: 4.64/4.13; overall: 4.48/3.83.

24. Survey question 25: all elective chapels: 4.52; all seated courses: 4.76; overall: 4.64.

course that utilized Plato's *Republic*, while the elective chapel which scored highest was the one that used Dante's *Inferno* as its Great Book.²⁵

Question 27: Educational Purpose

The students were questioned if their educational purpose changed during their experience: "I have an improved sense of educational purpose after having taken this Great Books class/elective chapel." Once again the students responded in a positive manner.²⁶

Question 28: Love for Learning

Measuring love for something can be difficult, but it was important to see if this dialectical process went beyond simply obligation and duty. The students were asked to evaluate the statement: "I have a greater love for learning after participating in this Great Books class/elective chapel." The students affirmed in each section that they had a greater love of learning after the experience. In fact, the scores given by the students in the elective chapels and those by the students in the seated courses were nearly identical.²⁷

25. Survey question 26: First Year Experience (Plato's *Republic*): 5.00; elective chapel (Dante's *Inferno*): 4.77; all elective chapels: 4.45; all seated courses: 4.41; overall: 4.43.

26. Survey question 27: all elective chapels: 4.49; all seated courses: 4.72; overall: 4.60.

27. Survey question 28: all elective chapels: 4.64; all seated courses: 4.66; overall: 4.66.

Question 29: Desire To Read More Challenging Materials

Reading classical literature such as the Great Books can be intimidating for some individuals. I wanted to see if the students' confidence increased as a result of the experience: "I have an increased desire to read/consider reading more challenging materials after having taken this Great Books/elective chapel." The scores were high in both sections, with the elective chapels having a slightly higher score.²⁸

Question 30: Great Books Experience Value On UVF Campus

The students were asked to rate the following statement: "The Great Books class/elective chapel is an asset to the overall VFCC [UVF] learning experience." This question garnered the highest cumulative score across the sections (5.54, 5.17), indicating a broad satisfaction with their Great Books experience.²⁹ This result gave the author confidence that this type of pedagogical approach could be an asset to any college or university program of study if it were strategically implemented with a committed group of students and an adequately trained leader.

Question 31: Enjoyment Of Great Books Class/Elective Chapel Experience

The final question asked the students to compare their satisfaction with the Great Books format with that of other formats: "I enjoyed this type of class experience (circle one) more (1), less (2), as much as (3) other elective chapel/class formats." The

28. Survey question 29: all elective chapels: 4.91; all seated courses: 4.81; overall: 4.86.

29. Survey question 30: all elective chapels: 5.54; all seated courses: 5.17; overall: 5.36.

First Year Experience students answered unanimously “more” (1.00) and the overall score results were also positive.³⁰

After examining all of the surveys, there didn’t appear to be much of a noticeable difference between the scores given from students in the elective chapels verses those given from students in the semester-long seated courses. Students scored indicated that the Great Books approach can be utilized successfully in either context.

Student Interviews

Throughout the project, I had the opportunity to hear from several students concerning the Great Books methodology. I asked them how the dialectical process affected their spiritual formation, as well as how the approach compared with a more traditional format (lectures) of teaching and learning. Here is a sampling of their responses, followed by my summary comments:

I really enjoy the great books format. Personally for me it is much more advantageous than traditional lectures. Completing the reflection questions each week allows me to absorb the material and pushed me to genuinely think about the topic. It allows me to assess my beliefs and the way I practice them. It pushes me to grow and develop. I also enjoy the discussions because it not only allows me to express my thoughts, but I get to hear the thoughts of others, which further allows me to expand my thinking. This entire methodology creates volume and depth for the topic we are learning.³¹

30. Survey question 31: First Year Experience (Plato’s *Republic*): 1.00; all elective chapels: 1.20; all seated courses: 1.44; overall: 1.32.

31. Student Interview 1, female, junior, Theo I: *Confessions*, December 3, 2014.

This response highlighted some of the benefits of a Great Books approach, including enjoyment, reflective thinking, assessing one's beliefs in the context of community, and an expansion of the topics being discussed.

I think using a Great Book methodology helps and hinders spiritual formation in a way. I know personally for me, the reflections actually made me think and do research and put effort into what I was trying to put forth. It made me think about what the Church Fathers were going through and if I were in their shoes, would my faith be strong enough to sustain me through it. On the flip side, when we were talking about it in class, I would tend to zone out and everything kind of went over my head. I didn't get it, and then I made no effort to understand because I thought that I had it covered. I found that with this book, the reflections helped, but the discussions didn't. I tend to learn more during a lecture that includes a worksheet. It keeps me focused and engaged in what is being said while also learning from the information being given. I also retain it better if I have something that I can look back on and reflect as well.³²

This student enjoyed the reflective elements of the class but did not care for the more participatory elements. Not everyone enjoyed or was comfortable learning in a setting using the Great Books methodology. This comment illustrates that a fairly high level of participation and focus is required to get everything possible out of the Shared Inquiry method; the process requires commitment and active engagement, which not all students may be willing or able to give.

Honestly I don't think using a great book methodology has helped my spiritual growth. All it has done was cause stress and make me feel more like a homework assignment and not gain anything except a few extra pieces of intelligence from what I can remember from the book.³³

32. Student interview 2, male, junior, Theo III: *Church Fathers*, November 23, 2015.

33. Student interview 3, male, junior, Theo III: *Church Fathers*, November 23, 2015.

This student clearly disliked the preparation time of doing reflective work before the live discussions and noted that it did not help his spiritual growth. This comment is a good reminder that no single educational methodology will have universal appeal or effectiveness.

For two semesters now I have used the Great Book discussions as the method of learning in two theology classes. This method of learning really worked for me. I enjoyed the method of reading something and getting my own grasp on it, and then moving on to discuss it with others. I do believe that this is a very impactful and effective method. However, for me the two different discussions had two different impacts. During my first great books method, we worked our way through Pilgrim's Progress and I rather enjoyed it as well as learned a lot from it. I believe a lot of this had to do with the fact that I enjoyed the story. This semester I did not seem to learn as much due to the fact that the book was not as interesting. I feel the great books discussion is a great tool to use in the classroom; it just needs to be kept interesting.³⁴

As one who had an opportunity to compare multiple sections of this project, this student's comments show that different texts affect students in different ways.

Students will respond to differing material in contrary ways.

Using the 'Great Book' methodology was helpful because I was able to read on my own and process the information on my own, and the questions helped me to draw conclusions in order to analyze the text. I found it useful because it gave me the chance to process my own thoughts on the book, and then the discussion helped to hear the opinions and views of others. One way that this could hinder spiritual formation is if the readers assume that the views in the text are always theologically correct and do not question them. It is easy to feel that a book has more credibility than a student, so I personally would have to remind myself that it is okay to question what the book says. Overall, I appreciated how it encourages independent study.³⁵

34. Student interview 4, female, senior, Theo III: *Church Fathers*, November 23, 2015.

35. Student interview 5, male, sophomore, Theo I: *Confessions*, December 3, 2014.

Independent thinking, reinforced or challenged by group discussion, was valued by this student. This student also gave a caution about giving too much allegiance to the opinions of the Great Book authors.

I appreciated how you didn't try to force us to change our minds, but allowed a format to consider other ideas.³⁶

This student appreciated the open-ended nature of the dialectical process, which does not look as much to create or form an opinion as it looks to form the person to receive and weigh numerous questions, thoughts and opinions.

I found that the implementation of a 'Great Book' methodology opened the opportunity to think for myself. Reading the text, searching for its meaning, and applying my own insight helped me develop a quality in interpretation: confidence. In a sense, studying independently forced me to think more than simply observe. These discussions also allowed me to share my independent thoughts and study with a group, so as to glean from other thoughts and insights. Perhaps a combination of both lectures and independent study is the most beneficial approach according to my personal opinion. Permitting personal reflection, aided with the correction and teaching of a lecture, leads students into times of discovery and formation of theology.³⁷

This student mentioned how the process helped him develop confidence in his capacity to work through the interpretive process. His comment suggests that through a combination of independent study, reflection, and discussion, one comes to a firmer sense of an issue or topic than just a single approach.

I feel like it helps my spiritual life a lot. When you are the one putting in the work and growing your beliefs and growing your spiritual life it will be better because it is what you believe and not what someone is telling you to believe. For me lectures are more boring and you don't learn and grow as much spiritually.³⁸

36. Student interview 6, male, sophomore, Elective Chapel: *Screwtape Letters*, April 27, 2016.

37. Student interview 7, male, junior, Theo I: *Confessions*, December 3, 2014.

38. Student interview 8, male, sophomore, Theo II: *Pilgrim's Progress*, April, 22, 2015.

This student acknowledged that the active processes involved in the Great Books methodology (reading, reflecting, and discussing) were more beneficial in his spiritual life than were stand-alone lectures.

I think the use of the Great Book methodology with questions and discussions aids our spiritual formation. I definitely think this method helped me to grow spiritually. Even though I am a quiet person I tend to grow and learned off of other peoples' questions. I do not ask many questions but I get more out of asking questions and discussions off of others questions than a traditional lecture. I honestly think this is a generality for all of the students as well. I think as God designed us to be relational we will always thrive in a community. Working out our thoughts and ideas as a class definitely helps us grow together.³⁹

The relational nature of people (and the fact that God designed us with said nature), was highlighted in these comments. The communal nature of a Great Books discussion format allows for a greater participatory experience, and the additional voices create a space in which relational dynamics play a significant role.

I think that this helped me realize what I believe and why. Often times I just say what I have believed since I was a child but never thought about the why behind it. I think that having this format helped because it was more discussion based so we could hear from our peers and start conversations to better understand what we believe.⁴⁰

Listening to additional voices helped this student better formulate her ideas, and the format granted her a place to articulate and express those ideas and beliefs.

I enjoyed the 'Great Book' methodology. Learning about the Church Fathers was inspiring, and did help me strengthen my relationship with Christ because I was learning more about Him through the lives of other people, real people. I valued our discussion times in class, which may have been hard to tell because I do not speak in them, but I enjoy

39. Student 9, female, sophomore, Elective Chapel: *Screwtape Letters*, April 27, 2016.

40. Student 10, female, junior, Theo II: *Pilgrim's Progress*, April 22, 2015.

listening to other people's opinions and questions much better than just listening to one professor rattle on for an hour.⁴¹

This one preferred the Great Books methodology to others because the readings and discussions allowed others to be conduits of learning about Christ more so than listening to a single lecturing professor allows.

Both lectures and discussions can complement the other and facilitate spiritual growth. The professor might have some profound revelation to share on the church fathers. The well-respected professor might even inspire his students in a similar manner as the church fathers simply from his lectures. Contrastingly, the church fathers text might be the best way for a student to truly connect, as the book is far more detailed than any lecture can be. The subsequent discussions provide even more opportunities for growth as other students share their own interpretations and input.⁴²

This student valued both the discussion and lecture models for their potential benefits to aid in one's growth.

The format of the Great Books has truly opened my eyes to the beauty of Literature and the effective way with which it speaks to us. Both in the conversations we have in the discussion books and these reflection papers we write, it is such an amazing experience to be able to learn and wrestle with the thoughts and pens of such great men and women.⁴³

Many students commented similarly: that the great minds of the Great Book authors inspired students to learn and wrestle with the various ideas and concepts shared in readings, reflections, and discussions.

This experience has forced me to think and really interact with my spirituality, whereas the lectures are easy to leave without learning a thing. The discussions were a great way to think outside of the box. I can honestly say that I have thought of different concepts and precepts that I would not have thought of on my own if I had not been prompted. Of all

41. Student 11, male, senior, Theo III: *Church Fathers*, November 23, 2015.

42. Student interview 12, female, senior, Theo III: *Church Fathers*, November 23, 2015.

43. Student interview 13, female, senior, Theo III: *Church Fathers*, November 23, 2015.

of the things I have learned this semester, *Pilgrim's Progress* has been the most interesting subject of study to date. Bunyan's storytelling is fantastic and the theological truths found within are thought provoking.⁴⁴

This student shared that his experience with the Great Books method prompted additional streams of thought to be stirred up during the process of discussion and study.

I felt that this was much more faith building than any other book I've had to read or course that I have taken. I was actually able to grow by reading this book and understanding and discussing it. I wish every class had the capacity to have more discussion because I don't learn very well from just listening.⁴⁵

The Great Books approach had a significant impact on this student, who attributed the descriptor "faith building" to the process.

In regards to the discussion group, I think this concept is brilliant and eye opening. I did not like *Pilgrim's Progress*, but I think the actual discussion group is very helpful. It gives the students an opportunity to be open and talk in a more intimate group, rather than a larger classroom, it gives the students more of a confidence to speak up. The hard part is that there are students in the discussion groups that voice their opinions a lot, which gives the rest of the students the feeling of not being as smart as the individual constantly responding, which lessens the actual 'group' discussion. Another aspect of the discussion group that works and is effective is the questions provided. It gives a direction in the discussion, rather than trying to figure out where to start or what to talk about. You don't have to stay completely on track of the questions from there on, but it gives everyone a sense of structure and order. When there is no structure, situations aren't taken seriously and become very lackadaisical.⁴⁶

This student's thoughtful feedback offered some great insight, even though they didn't care for the specific Great Book that was utilized. He suggests that students are more

44. Student interview 14, male, junior, Theo II: *Pilgrim's Progress*, April 22, 2015.

45. Student interview 15, male, sophomore, Theo II: *Pilgrim's Progress*, April 22, 2015.

46. Student interview 16, male, sophomore, Theo II: *Pilgrim's Progress*, April 22, 2015.

apt to share in a discussion within a smaller group setting than in a large group setting, especially when questions are initially provided as prompts.

Using a Great Book methodology was a help to spiritual formation. It gave the theological material in a way that made you think as to what it really meant and gave biblical references to look up each thought. I think this helped me, because it made me think more than I normally would have about each topic throughout the book and made me notice things in my life that corresponded to different topics covered. Traditional lectures, on occasion, help me learn, but because it's not something that I can actually think about and continue to think about it doesn't stick as well. With the reading, question and answers, it helped more because I got to read, and then think about things, and then reflect on each with made it more applicable to me.⁴⁷

The nature of the Great Books format generated a continuing invitation to reflect on the material for this individual. This ultimately effectuated in this student a sense that what he was reading was "applicable" to him, perhaps more so than it would have been otherwise.

I greatly enjoyed this form of education. More often than not I prefer to learn in a lecture format, but this Great Book discussion significantly improved my spiritual life. I enjoyed meditating on what I read every week and looked forward to meeting for class each week to discuss what I had learned and to hear what others had learned also. As often as I could I attended each of the weekly discussion (even though only one was required) because I actually learned in this class.⁴⁸

This student said that her spiritual life "significantly improved" as a result of the Great Books methodology, even though she generally preferred lectures. She considered the act of meditating on the readings enjoyable, and her desire to learn more generated excitement about gathering with other students each week.

47. Student interview 17, male, sophomore, Theo II: *Pilgrim's Progress*, April 22, 2015.

48. Student interview 18, female, junior, Theo I: *Confessions*, December 3, 2014.

I believe this method of following the book all the way through was very beneficial in the formation of my spirituality, probably more so than the traditional lecture. *Pilgrim's Progress* was a fantastic read since it was entirely made of theology based completely in Scriptures, along with Scriptural references included to make it easy for anyone to look into it who may doubt the theology presented. Also, the book presented theology practically in a way that was almost easier to relate to than the Bible.⁴⁹

Tracking a Great Book “all the way through” benefited this student’s spiritual formation, especially because of the Scriptural and theological content.

Using the format of answering weekly questions based upon the chapters in the book was certainly helpful in that it forced me to read and pay close attention to the story and to look for and be aware of the underlying spiritual truths of the story. I’m not certain that I can say that this format necessarily ‘aided’ my spiritual formation, though there were certainly many spiritual truths within the book that I was able to pick up on and enjoyed the way in which Bunyan presented them. However, though I fully appreciate the benefit of this method of teaching/learning, I believe that I would have benefitted more (both spiritually and mentally) from more traditional lectures. Not that I would like to see the Great Books teaching/learning method done away with, but perhaps lessened to one day of class each week with the others as straight lectures.⁵⁰

This student’s response was somewhat mixed; she was not able to claim that the methodology assisted in her spiritual formation process, though she appeared to glean some spiritual truths along the way.

I have really enjoyed both of the ‘Great Book’ methodology classes that I have been a part of thus far, and I am looking forward to Theology III next semester and doing it again with another book. I think a lot of what we read in these books we need to talk about more than just thinking about it and reading it. So this class and this methodology gives us the opportunity to do that, processing what we read even more with those

49. Student interview 19, female, sophomore, Theo II: *Pilgrim's Progress*, April 22, 2015.

50. Student interview 20, male, sophomore, Theo II: *Pilgrim's Progress*, April 22, 2015.

around us. I think because of that, this definitely helps me to grow more in this way throughout the semester.⁵¹

This student acknowledged that having additional voices present to help process the material assisted in his growth more significantly than did comparable approaches such as lectures during the same semester.

Using a Great Book methodology can aid spiritual formation. Personally, I found that this format aided me in spiritual formation more than straight lectures. *Pilgrim's Progress* helped me to better apply what I am learning in my own life. I found it easier to process and relate to.⁵²

Several students, including this one, seemed to suggest a greater ability to apply the readings, topics, and issues to their personal lives as a result of the Great Book readings and format.

This was an interesting experience. I did enjoy the readings but the structure of the class unfortunately was a little obtuse. I would prefer a more structured teaching style so I can get a clearer understanding on how to think. This type of learning is more appropriate on the graduate level. Unfortunately I will not be able to experience such learning on the graduate level and I am experiencing it here at the undergraduate level. This class would be better with a lecture structure. Lectures do not have to be boring, they can be fun and engaging if done properly. This of course, is all dependent upon the commitment of the professor to the topic. I rate the overall experience a 2/5.⁵³

This student clearly preferred lectures as a methodology and felt that a committed professor should be able to make lectures engaging. The Great Books approach, he felt, was “obtuse” and should be reserved for graduate work. Given what the Great Books approach requires of students in a class setting—a commitment to reflecting on

51. Student interview 21, male, junior, Theo II: *Pilgrim's Progress*, April 22, 2015.

52. Student interview 22, female, junior, Theo II: *Pilgrim's Progress*, April 22, 2015.

53. Student interview 23, male, junior, Theo I, *Confessions*, December 3, 2014.

material on their own and a willingness to engage with others' thoughts, an exercise which requires that students be familiar enough with the material to defend their own readings and enter into the readings of others through discussion—it is not a surprise that some students might not prefer it to lecture, which in many ways can be easier to digest given that such instruction generally presents pre-digested material.

I would say that using the 'Great Book' format with reflection questions and small group discussion brings a dynamic to the classroom that cannot be achieved in traditional lectures. This method allows students to interact with concepts and ideas in a way that they probably would not unless they were that annoying kid in class that asks so many questions that no one else learns since the material is not covered.⁵⁴

The interaction pathways offered to students in a Great Books format was mentioned as a strength by this student. The reflection questions and small group discussion provide points of intersection with issues and topics that lectures can't address in the same manner, and it allows students to ask questions that traditional classes do not have time to examine. Indeed, the Great Books format works for courses because, ideally, students study the material at home, so precious class time is not wasted providing a basic summary of the material.

It is hard for me to say which has helped me in spiritual formation more since a professor that straight lectures rarely helps my spiritually formation, but one that allows for interaction and discussion alongside of a lecture certainly helps me. These small group discussion sessions also allow me to hear other people's perspectives while having the opportunity to share my own. I think some of the difference is when people who either think that they do not really know enough to have anything to share or are unwilling to share do not enter into the discussions, which would either teach them through listening or be worthless to them when they do not pay attention.⁵⁵

54. Student interview 24, male, junior, Theo I, *Confessions*, December 3, 2014.

55. Student interview 25, female, sophomore, Theo I: *Confessions*, December 3, 2014.

This student mentions that spiritual formation can and does occur through lectures if the professor can also include a discussion outlet that engages with the students. The small group discussions allow for a reciprocal flow of thoughts.

I thought this book was excellent. I loved the methodology, and the symbols within this book that it changed my perspective on my Christian walk. I thought the wisdom and knowledge that is contained in this book made me want to repent and also change things in my personal walk with Christ. It was encouraging that there will be hardships but God will guard me. Also, I believe that a good Christian friend is helpful in my relationship with Christ, so I believe God will send me that a great woman of God to help me during my journey. This friend will encourage me and uplift me during times of weaknesses. Iron sharpens iron.⁵⁶

The methodology of the course and the contents of the Great Book (*Pilgrim's Progress*) were mentioned as aids to repentance by this student. This demonstrates the power of these works; if readers explore and absorb the lessons found within the pages, they come away changed. The importance of Christian friendship, one of the themes in the book, was also acknowledged.

I actually really enjoy the great books discussions that we have had with *Pilgrim's Progress* and Saint Augustine's *Confessions*. I really enjoy the concept of talking through the reading because I personally like to talk and also because I learn very well by listening to others thoughts while thinking through my own. It also helps because it provides accountability to our thoughts.⁵⁷

The importance of taking joy in learning is seen in this student's response, as well as the concept of "accountability" to others as one shares their thoughts in open dialogue. This accountability is indeed a feature of shared inquiry; other students and the facilitator

56. Student interview 26, male, senior, Theo II: *Pilgrim's Progress*, April 22, 2015.

57. Student interview 27, female, junior, Theo I: *Confessions*, December 3, 2014.

serve to keep discussion focused around what the author has written and what the implications might be. Such discussions allow for creative interpretation but also require students to support their interpretations with textual support.

I would much rather be in this type of setting than straight lectures because it is more interactive and it helps us learn a more indepth topic in a more practical way. I grow more spiritually by going through the book because it sparks thoughts in my mind that would not have been in my mind if we were discussing it through a classroom lecture.⁵⁸

Both the interactive nature of this methodology and the reflective elements of engaging a Great Book were highlighted by this student.

This methodology helped me evaluate myself. I could look at my life through a different lens. I could see from a perspective that I couldn't see before. I primarily saw the different masks that I wear. I would call myself a Christian, but when I am in the moment, how many times do I fall into the same many traps that Christian and his companions did. I could also identity my strengths and weaknesses. I can see where I need growth and maturity and where I am doing well.⁵⁹

Self-evaluation and the discipline of the examen, at least in a rudimentary form, was alluded to in this student's response. The reflective nature of the methodology opens up additional pathways for self-examination.

I enjoyed these Great Book reflection questions and discussions. They have made me really think about what I just read, helping to further imprint the knowledge into my memory. Most of the time, I have found the discussions to be helpful in clarifying some point that I did not totally understand. As far as spiritual formation, this methodology has aided in my spiritual growth, because these questions and discussions have been useful. They have helped me to reflect upon my own thoughts and feelings. Putting to words some things that I didn't even know that I felt. These questions have opened my eyes to confront what I have tried to hide. Moreover, traditional lectures are ok, but I enjoyed this learning style mostly because of hearing the thoughts of my fellow peers. I

58. Student interview 28, female, sophomore, Theo I, *Confessions*, December 3, 2014.

59. Student interview, 29, female, junior, Theo II: *Pilgrim's Progress*, April 22, 2015.

understand that we all have different ways of thinking, so I benefit from hearing other people's opinions. Also, this style of teaching fosters and encourages more class participation.⁶⁰

This student affirmed several things: her enjoyment of the process, the method's invitation to use critical thinking, discussion's added value of bringing clarity, the usefulness of questions and discussions in personal spiritual formation, her increased ability to articulate thoughts and feelings, and the format's invitation for greater participation from peers.

For me it has really grown me spiritually. I feel like I would have learned a lot better doing this than class lectures. When we have the group discussions it is nice to hear what other people were thinking. Since reading *Pilgrim's Progress*, I can see that it is like every Christian's journey to Heaven. It is going to have its ups and its downs but when you get to it all of the downs were worth it. I feel like I learned a lot more from reading this book. I would have to say that this book and *Confessions* of Augustine have both been really helpful in my walk with God. This being physical, mental, and spiritual walk with God. I have already recommended this book to my parents and to a few of my friends in my home church. It has been a really great book to read and to learn from. I have really enjoyed learning from this book.⁶¹

The Great Books this student studied seemed to assist in his spiritual life to the point that he felt compelled to recommend them to family and friends.

I think that this really helped me understand things more. I think that when it comes to lectures it is easy to not pay attention and to just check out of the class. But with this I was able to interact at my own pace and the questions got me thinking about my own relationship with God. I think that I understand more about God and my own relationship with him because of the reading and the questions that we did in this book.⁶²

60. Student interview 30, female, sophomore, Theo II: *Pilgrim's Progress*, April 22, 2015.

61. Student interview 31, male, junior, Theo II: *Pilgrim's Progress*, April 22, 2015.

62. Student interview 32, male, junior, Theo I, *Confessions*, December 3, 2014.

This student reported that the Great Book and the questions that were posed throughout the semester brought her a greater understanding about God.

I believe this aided in my spiritual formation. I connect with God through learning and thinking. Reading and discussing a book such as this is perfect for my growth in God. I could see how it isn't for everybody, though. Not everybody connects with God in that manner, though I would argue that this is a theology class and would be the appropriate place to see how you connect with God in this format. It could be a learning experience even for those who don't usually connect with God like this. I believed this was much more beneficial than straight lectures. Straight lectures on theology are always better than most lectures to me, but they still aren't the best way I learn. I learn better from discussion and reflection. I need something that exercises my mind for me to truly gain something from it. Straight lectures are usually things I will forget after the class is over.⁶³

This student acknowledged that this format might not be for everyone, but that she herself connected to God through the class's readings and format.

I enjoyed these discussions significantly more than the lectures, mainly because it provided an introspective look at my faith and also lent to my being able to see the walks of others in the class.⁶⁴

This student suggests that reflective or "introspective" opportunities afforded in the class allowed her to examine her faith. She noted that the course possessed a community aspect due to the sharing of others throughout the semester.

While I have determined that I already was drawn to a dialectic learning method, I was never able to put a name to it. I see now that investigating and finding my own truths will help me to learn in a new way. It will no longer just be useless information stored in my mind, but applicable life skills that I will carry with me in my future career. I have learned to apply this to my spiritual life as well. In order to learn effectively, I have to experience the technique. The only way this is possible is through the

63. Student interview 33, female, junior, Theo II: *Pilgrim's Progress*, April 22, 2015.

64. Student interview 34, female, sophomore, Theo II: *Pilgrim's Progress*, April 22, 2015.

reading and discussion of a great book. My hope is that I will be able to be in a class that can do this kind of learning again.⁶⁵

This student credits the dialectical method with assisting her in both her spiritual life and developing life skills. Her comments demonstrate that the learning enterprise is far more than simply the accumulation of information or facts; experiential knowledge and critical thinking are also required for practical life that ensues after college.

Learning about dialectic has given a term to the method of learning that I have been pursuing for years. I give thanks to my Honors First Year Experience course, because it has taught me to admire philosophy and it has encouraged me to pursue looking at things in a new light. My hope is that as I continue on with my next seven semesters, I am prepared to defend my faith, grow in knowledge, and learn with passion rather than for the right answer.⁶⁶

This student expresses her conviction that the Great Books method she experienced in this course helped prepare her to face issues of defending her faith, to grow in knowledge, and to learn with passion rather than to learn something simply to get the correct answer for a test.

Overall I have loved this class and its setup. Using the dialectic method in the Great Books format has been more beneficial to me than a lecture class. I feel like I can take more out of this class than just listening to a lecture or reading a textbook because I am actively involved in my learning. Going forward I would love to take more classes that are setup this way. I am going to continue to use the dialectic method whenever I can because I feel like this is the only way that I will find out the truth and reasons behind what I am being taught.⁶⁷

The active participation involved in a Great Books format was the reason given

65. Student interview 35, female, freshman, First Year Experience: Plato's *Republic*, Dec 4, 2015.

66. Student interview 36, female, freshman, First Year Experience: Plato's *Republic*, Dec 4, 2015.

67. Student interview 37, male, freshman, First Year Experience: Plato's *Republic*, Dec 4, 2015.

by this student for their preference over a lecture format. He contrasted the pursuit of truth in an active, participatory manner with simply regurgitating “truth” from one person to another.

I would like to affirm that I have never learned the truths of reality as effectively as I have by using the analogy of cave and dialectic. I have also discovered effective ways to apply dialectic and the cave to my education and my Christian faith and I have thoroughly enjoyed doing so.⁶⁸

This student affirmed that the dialectical approach and some of the content of the Great Book (“the cave”) effectively assisted him in both his educational and faith journeys.

The dialectic method has really helped me be able to understand ideas in a more full sense. Instead of just listening or reading information to read it, remember it, and then rehash it for a test in order to get a good grade, dialectic is a wonderful tool that allows for a better understanding and retention of ideas, a fondness for digging into a text and asking questions, and a way to implement and apply the ideas in a meaningful way.⁶⁹

The Great Books approach assisted this student in creating an experience that allowed for a fuller understanding of ideas. It also promoted a “fondness” for the active elements of the methodology, as well as a pathway for applying concepts in a “meaningful way.”

Previously, I understood education as just the process by which we receive systematic information that schools think we need to know for the future. This definition left out the whole other side of education, which is the developing of the love and pursuit of learning. This concept is, or at least should be, at the basis of what is being taught in every class all the way from elementary school to college. What is being taught should indirectly lead to the love of learning, if done right. Love for learning is like a muscle. One needs to continually use and stretch it for the muscle, and therefore love of learning, to increase. This is one of the

68. Student interview 38, male, freshman, First Year Experience: Plato’s *Republic*, Dec 4, 2015.

69. Student interview 39, female, freshman, First Year Experience: Plato’s *Republic*, Dec 4, 2015.

reasons why reading a 'Great Book' with a seminar method of learning is beneficial.⁷⁰

Developing the love of learning was highlighted by this student as a benefit of a Great Books approach. He argues that the goal of education is not merely to acquire information, but to create a passion and desire to love the process, for the process promotes the enjoyable pursuit of the truth.

I am also very grateful for the other lovers of learning that I have gotten to know in this class. They have pushed me to be better, probably without even knowing it. When several lovers of learning come together and discuss a 'Great Book,' there is hardly any chance that one cannot grow and be inspired by the experience, which is certainly what happened for me in this class.⁷¹

This student's comment reveals that being in the company of others who also love to learn can whet one's appetite for learning and inspire individuals to grow. This is a distinct benefit to engaging in a Great Books discussion with others who desire to learn.

Questions upon even more questions are an integral part in growing in Christ and figuring out what is right for one's own life. Even if one does not find the specific answer one was looking for, hardly ever is one less knowledgeable than before they started the journey looking for an answer to the question.⁷²

The Great Books methodology offers a pathway for a multitude of questions. While a discussion does not always offer a firm answer to any given question, students can still greatly benefit from the process, as they gain knowledge and insight through the pursuit.

70. Student interview 40, female, freshman, First Year Experience: Plato's *Republic*, Dec 4, 2015.

71. Student interview 41, male, freshman, First Year Experience: Plato's *Republic*, Dec 4, 2015.

72. Student interview 42, female, freshman, First Year Experience: Plato's *Republic*, Dec 4, 2015.

Conclusion

The objective of this project was to explore the role of questions in spiritual formation utilizing a Great Books pedagogy. The project grew to be fairly substantial, producing a large volume of data over an extended period of time. Many students participated and exerted significant effort throughout the various chapel and classroom experiences. The project required significant coordination, exertion, focus, perseverance, and follow-up to bring it to completion. In hindsight, the author probably should have narrowed the scope of the project so as to complete it in a timelier manner. However, each additional class and elective chapel allowed more students to experience the Great Books approach to learning and produced more data for examination and analysis.

The pedagogical approach was well-received and, for many students, quite novel. It was successful in terms of the project's objective and subsequent results. The author contends that this approach did, in fact, positively contribute to the spiritual formation of the students who participated. There are clearly many successful pedagogical approaches that can assist in the disciple-making process, and among them could be added, in select circumstances, the one used in this project.

While spiritual formation is extremely difficult to empirically quantify, both the survey results and personal interviews strongly expressed a favorable and affirmative impact of using the Great Books methodology. It should be noted that not all students had a positive experience with this approach. They were, however, clearly in the minority; the vast majority of students gave feedback suggesting that they had positive

experiences with the pedagogical approach used for this project.

Student participation, interaction, and interest remained high throughout the project in both the seated courses and elective chapels. Students and colleagues provided a plethora of helpful responses, constructive feedback, and useful suggestions throughout the project. Students took the evaluation process seriously and provided information that demonstrated they would be interested in continuing to use a Great Books approach in their ongoing spiritual formation processes.

High student interest and participation brought positive results in significant areas, including spiritual growth, increased love of learning, introspection, further study, and development of the students' own desire to pose and respond to questions—all that the author had hoped.

Going forward, the author recommends implementing a Great Books approach within the context of any institution of higher learning. Through reading and analysis of the Great Books, students are allowed to interact with the heroes of the Christian faith as well as the heroes of antiquity. The approach also offers students an alternative to strictly “talking head” classroom instruction or lecture. The project's results provide evidence that the approach implemented in this project also has the potential to enhance classroom learning by developing higher levels of student involvement, discussion, introspection, motivation, and inspiration.

The author would like to thank my students, the authors of the Great Books, advisors, partners, staff, editors, my precious family (especially my wife!), and most importantly, my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

APPENDIX A

GREAT BOOKS OF THE WESTERN WORLD

The Syntopicon - An Index to the Great Ideas (2 volumes):
Angel to Love, Man to World

Homer: *Iliad, Odyssey*

Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes:

Aeschylus: *Plays*

Sophocles: *Plays*

Euripides: *Plays*

Aristophanes: *Plays*

Herodotus, Thucydides:

Herodotus: *History*

Thucydides: *The History of the Peloponnesian War*

Plato: *Dialogues, Seventh Letter*

Aristotle (I): *Works*

Aristotle (II): *Works* (continued)

Hippocrates, Galen:

Hippocrates: *Hippocratic Writings*

Galen: *On the Natural Faculties*

Euclid, Archimedes, Nicomachus:

Euclid: *Elements*

Archimedes: *Works* (including *The Method*)

Nicomachus: *Introduction to Arithmetic*

Lucretius, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Plotinus:

Lucretius: *The Way Things Are*

Epictetus: *Discourses*

Marcus Aurelius: *The Meditations*

Plotinus: *The Six Enneads*

Virgil: *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid*

Plutarch: *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*

Tacitus: *Annals, Histories*

Ptolemy, Copernicus, Kepler:

Ptolemy: *Almagest*

Copernicus: *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*

Kepler: *Epitome of Copernican Astronomy, The Harmonies of the World*

Augustine: *The Confessions, The City of God, On Christian Doctrine*

Thomas Aquinas (I): *Summa Theologica*

Thomas Aquinas (II): *Summa Theologica* (continued)

Dante, Chaucer:

Dante: *Divine Comedy*

Chaucer: *Troilus and Criseyde, Canterbury Tales*

Calvin: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*

Machiavelli, Hobbes:

Machiavelli: *The Prince*

Hobbes: *Leviathan, or, Matter, Form and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiastical and Civil*

Rabelais: *Gargantua and Pantagruel*

Erasmus, Montaigne:

Erasmus: *Praise of Folly*

Montaigne: *Essays*

Shakespeare (I): *The Plays and Sonnets*

Shakespeare (II): *The Plays and Sonnets* (continued)

Gilbert, Galileo, Harvey:

Gilbert: *On the Loadstone and Magnetic Bodies*

Galileo: *Concerning the Two New Sciences*

Harvey: *On the Motion of the Heart and Blood in Animals, On the Circulation of the Blood, On the Generation of Animals*

Cervantes: *The History of Don Quixote de la Mancha*

Bacon, Descartes, Spinoza:

Bacon: *Advancement of Learning, Novum Organum, New Atlantis*

Descartes: *Rules for the Direction of the Mind, Discourse on the Method, Meditations on First Philosophy, Objections Against the Meditations and Replies, The Geometry*

Spinoza: *Ethics*

Milton: English minor poems, *Paradise Lost, Samson Agonistes, Areopagitica*

Pascal: *The Provincial Letters, Pensees, Scientific Treatises*

Moliere, Racine:

Moliere: *The School for Wives, The Critique of the School for Wives, Tartuffe, Don Juan, The Miser, The Would-Be Gentleman, The Would-Be Invalid*

Racine: *Berenice*

Newton, Huygens:

Newton: *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy, Optics*

Huygens: *Treatise on Light*

Locke, Berkeley:

Locke: *A Letter Concerning Toleration, Concerning Civil Government, Second Essay, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*

Berkeley: *The Principles of Human Knowledge*

Hume: *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*

Swift, Voltaire, Diderot:

Swift: *Gulliver's Travels*

Voltaire: *Candide*

Diderot: *Rameau's Nephew*

Montesquieu, Rousseau:

Montesquieu: *The Spirit of Laws*

Rousseau: *On the Origin of Inequality, On Political Economy, The Social Contract*

Smith: *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*

Gibbon (I): *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*

Gibbon (II): *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (continued)

Kant: *The Critique of Pure Reason, The Critique of Practical Reason, and Other Ethical Treatises, The Critique of Judgment*

American State Papers, The Federalist, Mill:

Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, The Constitution

Hamilton, Madison, Jay: *The Federalist*

Mill: *On Liberty, Representative Government, Utilitarianism*

Boswell: *Life of Samuel Johnson*, LL. D

Lavoisier, Faraday:

Lavoisier: *Elements of Chemistry*

Faraday: *Experimental Researches in Electricity*

Hegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche:

Hegel: *The Philosophy of Right, The Philosophy of History*

Kierkegaard: *Fear and Trembling*

Nietzsche: *Beyond Good and Evil*

Tocqueville: *Democracy in America*

Goethe, Balzac:

Goethe: *Faust: Parts One and Two*

Balzac: *Cousin Bette*

Austen, Eliot:

Austen: *Emma*

Eliot: *Middlemarch*

Dickens: *Little Dorrit*

Melville, Twain:

Melville: *Moby Dick, or, The Whale*

Twain: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Darwin: *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*

Marx, Engels:

Marx (edited by Engels): *Capital*

Marx and Engels: *Manifesto of the Communist Party*

Tolstoy: *War and Peace*

Dostoyevsky, Ibsen:

Dostoyevsky: *The Brothers Karamazov*

Ibsen: *A Doll's House, The Wild Duck, Hedda Gabler, The Master Builder*

James: *The Principles of Psychology*

Freud: *The Major Works of Sigmund Freud*

20th Century Philosophy and Religion:

James: *Pragmatism*

Bergson: *An Introduction to Metaphysics*

Dewey: *Experience and Education*

Whitehead: *Science and the Modern World*

Russell: *The Problems of Philosophy*

Heidegger: *What is Metaphysics?*

Wittgenstein: *Philosophical Investigations*

Barth: *The Word of God and the Word of Man*

20th Century Natural Science:

Poincare: *Science and Hypothesis*

Planck: *Scientific Autobiography and Other Papers*

Whitehead: *An Introduction to Mathematics*

Einstein: *Relativity: The Special and the General Theory*

Eddington: *The Expanding Universe*

Bohr: *Atomic Theory and the Description of Nature* (selections), *Discussion with Einstein on Epistemological Problems in Atomic Physics*

Hardy: *A Mathematician's Apology*

Heisenberg: *Physics and Philosophy*

Schrodinger: *What is Life?*

Dobzhansky: *Genetics and the Origin of Species*

Waddington: *The Nature of Life*

20th Century Social Science (I):

Veblen: *The Theory of the Leisure Class*

Tawney: *The Acquisitive Society*

Keynes: *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*

20th Century Social Science (II):

Frazer: *The Golden Bough* (selections)

Weber: *Essays in Sociology* (selections)

Huizinga: *The Waning of the Middle Ages*

Levi-Strauss: *Structural Anthropology* (selections)

20th Century Imaginative Literature (I):

James: *The Beast in the Jungle*

Shaw: *Saint Joan*

Conrad: *Heart of Darkness*

Chekhov: *Uncle Vanya*
Pirandello: *Six Characters in Search of an Author*
Proust: *Remembrance of Things Past*. "Swann in Love"
Cather: *A Lost Lady*
Mann: *Death in Venice*
Joyce: *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

20th Century Imaginative Literature (II):

Woolf: *To the Lighthouse*
Kafka: *Metamorphosis*
Lawrence: *The Prussian Officer*
Eliot: *The Waste Land*
O'Neill: *Mourning Becomes Electra*
Fitzgerald: *The Great Gatsby*
Faulkner: *A Rose for Emily*
Brecht: *Mother Courage and Her Children*
Hemingway: *The Short Happy Life of Macomber*
Orwell: *Animal Farm*
Beckett: *Waiting for Godot*

Adler, Mortimer, et al. Great Books of the Western World. Encyclopedia Britannica, 1990.

APPENDIX B

THE HARVARD CLASSICS

- VOL I. His Autobiography, by Benjamin Franklin
Journal, by John Woolman
Fruits of Solitude, by William Penn
- II. The Apology, Phædo and Crito of Plato
The Golden Sayings of Epictetus
The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius
- III. Essays, Civil and Moral & The New Atlantis, by Francis Bacon
Areopagitica & Tractate on Education, by John Milton
Religio Medici, by Sir Thomas Browne
- IV. Complete Poems Written in English, by John Milton
- V. Essays and English Traits, by Ralph Waldo Emerson
- VI. Poems and Songs, by Robert Burns
- VII. The Confessions of Saint Augustine
The Imitation of Christ, by Thomas à Kempis
- VIII. Agamemnon, The Libation-Bearers, The Furies & Prometheus
Bound of Aeschylus
Oedipus the King & Antigone of Sophocles
Hippolytus & The Bacchæ of Euripides
The Frogs of Aristophanes
- IX. On Friendship, On Old Age & Letters, by Cicero
Letters, by Pliny the Younger
- X. Wealth of Nations, by Adam Smith
- XI. The Origin of Species, by Charles Darwin
- XII. Lives, by Plutarch
- XIII. Æneid, by Vergil
- XIV. Don Quixote, Part 1, by Cervantes
- XV. The Pilgrim's Progress, by John Bunyan
The Lives of Donne and Herbert, by Izaak Walton
- XVI. Stories from the Thousand and One Nights

- XVII. Fables, by Æsop
Household Tales, by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm
Tales, by Hans Christian Andersen
- XVIII. All for Love, by John Dryden
The School for Scandal, by Richard Brinsley Sheridan
She Stoops to Conquer, by Oliver Goldsmith
The Cenci, by Percy Bysshe Shelley
A Blot in the 'Scutcheon, by Robert Browning
Manfred, by Lord Byron
- XIX. Faust, Part I, Egmont & Hermann and Dorothea, by J.W. von Goethe
Dr. Faustus, by Christopher Marlowe
- XX. The Divine Comedy, by Dante Alighieri
- XXI. I Promessi Sposi, by Alessandro Manzoni
- XXII. The Odyssey of Homer
- XXIII. Two Years before the Mast, by Richard Henry Dana, Jr.
- XXIV. On Taste, On the Sublime and Beautiful, Reflections on the French
Revolution & A Letter to a Noble Lord, by Edmund Burke
- XXV. Autobiography & On Liberty, by John Stuart Mill
Characteristics, Inaugural Address at Edinburgh & Sir Walter Scott, by Thomas
Carlyle
- XXVI. Life Is a Dream, by Pedro Calderón de la Barca
Polyeucte, by Pierre Corneille
Phædra, by Jean Racine
Tartuffe, by Molière
Minna von Barnhelm, by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing
Wilhelm Tell, by Friedrich von Schiller
- XXVII. English Essays: Sidney to Macaulay
- XXVIII. Essays: English and American
- XXIX. The Voyage of the Beagle, by Charles Darwin
- XXX. Scientific Papers
- XXXI. The Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini
- XXXII. Literary and Philosophical Essays
- XXXIII. Voyages and Travels: Ancient and Modern

- XXXIV. Discourse on Method, by René Descartes
Letters on the English, by Voltaire
On the Inequality among Mankind & Profession of Faith of a Savoyard Vicar,
by Jean Jacques Rousseau
Of Man, Being the First Part of Leviathan, by Thomas Hobbes
- XXXV. The Chronicles of Jean Froissart
The Holy Grail, by Sir Thomas Malory
A Description of Elizabethan England, by William Harrison
- XXXVI. The Prince, by Niccolo Machiavelli
The Life of Sir Thomas More, by William Roper
Utopia, by Sir Thomas More
The Ninety-Five Thesis, Address to the Christian Nobility & Concerning
Christian Liberty, by Martin Luther
- XXXVII. Some Thoughts Concerning Education, by John Locke
Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous in Opposition to Sceptics and
Atheists, by George Berkeley
An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, by David Hume
- XXXVIII. The Oath of Hippocrates
Journeys in Diverse Places, by Ambroise Paré
On the Motion of the Heart and Blood in Animals, by William Harvey
The Three Original Publications on Vaccination Against Smallpox, by Edward
Jenner
The Contagiousness of Puerperal Fever, by Oliver Wendell Holmes
On the Antiseptic Principle of the Practice of Surgery, by Joseph Lister
Scientific Papers, by Louis Pasteur
Scientific Papers, by Charles Lyell
- XXXIX. Prefaces and Prologues
- XL. English Poetry I: Chaucer to Gray
- XLI. English Poetry II: Collins to Fitzgerald
- XLII. English Poetry III: Tennyson to Whitman
- XLIII. American Historical Documents: 1000–1904
- XLIV. Confucian: The Sayings of Confucius
Hebrew: Job, Psalms & Ecclesiastes
Christian I: Luke & Acts

- XLV. Christian II: Corinthians I & II & Hymns
 Buddhist: Writings
 Hindu: The Bhagavad-Gita
 Mohammedan: Chapters from the Koran
- XLVI. Edward the Second, by Christopher Marlowe
 Hamlet, King Lear, Macbeth & The Tempest, by William Shakespeare
- XLVII. The Shoemaker's Holiday, by Thomas Dekker
 The Alchemist, by Ben Jonson
 Philaster, by Beaumont and Fletcher
 The Duchess of Malfi, by John Webster
 A New Way to Pay Old Debts, by Philip Massinger
- XLVIII. Thoughts, Letters & Minor Works, by Blaise Pascal
- XLIX. Epic & Saga: Beowulf, The Song of Roland, The Destruction of Dá Derga's
 Hostel & The Story of the Volsungs and Niblungs
- LI. Lectures on the Harvard Classics

Eliot, Charles W., "The Harvard Classics" and "The Shelf of Fiction" (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1909-1917): <http://www.bartleby.com/hc/> (accessed December 8, 2016).

APPENDIX C

ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE READING LIST

FRESHMAN YEAR

Homer: Iliad, Odyssey
Aeschylus: Agamemnon, Libation Bearers, The Eumenides, Prometheus Bound
Sophocles: Oedipus Rex, Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone, Philoctetes, Ajax
Thucydides: Peloponnesian War
Euripides: Hippolytus, The Bacchae
Herodotus: Histories
Aristophanes: Clouds, Frogs
Plato: Meno, Gorgias, Republic, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Symposium, Parmenides, Theaetetus, Sophist, Timaeus, Phaedrus
Aristotle: Poetics, Physics, Metaphysics, Nicomachean Ethics, On Generation and Corruption, Politics, Parts of Animals, Generation of Animals
Euclid: Elements
Lucretius: On the Nature of Things
Plutarch: "Lycurgus" and "Solon" from the Parallel Lives
Ptolemy: Almagest
Blaise Pascal: Treatise on the Equilibrium of Liquids
Nicomachus: Arithmetic
Antoine Lavoisier: Elements of Chemistry
William Harvey: Motion of the Heart and Blood
Essays by: Archimedes, Gabriel Fahrenheit, Amedeo Avogadro, John Dalton, Stanislao Cannizzaro, Rudolf Virchow, Edme Mariotte, Hans Adolf Eduard Driesch, Joseph Louis Gay-Lussac, Hans Spemann, Guy Beckley Stearns, J. J. Thomson, Dmitri Mendeleev, Claude Louis Berthollet, Joseph Proust

SOPHOMORE YEAR

Hebrew Bible
New Testament
Aristotle: De Anima, On Interpretation, Prior Analytics, Categories
Apollonius: Conics
Virgil: Aeneid
Plutarch: "Caesar", "Cato the Younger", "Antony", and "Brutus" from the Parallel Lives
Epictetus: Discourses, Manual
Tacitus: Annals
Ptolemy: Almagest
Plotinus: The Enneads
Augustine of Hippo: Confessions
Maimonides: Guide for the Perplexed
Anselm of Canterbury: Proslogium
Thomas Aquinas: Summa Theologica
Dante: Divine Comedy
Geoffrey Chaucer: Canterbury Tales
Niccolò Machiavelli: The Prince, Discourses

Nicolaus Copernicus: On the Revolutions of the Spheres
 Johannes Kepler: Epitome IV
 Livy: Early History of Rome
 Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina: Missa Papae Marcelli
 Michel de Montaigne: Essays
 François Viète: Introduction to the Analytical Art
 Francis Bacon: Novum Organum
 William Shakespeare: Richard II, Henry IV, Part 1, Henry IV, Part 2, The Tempest, As You Like It, Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, King Lear, Sonnets
 Poems by: Andrew Marvell, John Donne, and other 16th- and 17th-century poets
 René Descartes: Geometry, Discourse on Method
 Blaise Pascal: Generation of Conic Sections
 Johann Sebastian Bach: St. Matthew Passion, Inventions
 Joseph Haydn: Quartets
 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Operas
 Ludwig van Beethoven: Third Symphony
 Franz Schubert: Songs
 Claudio Monteverdi: L'Orfeo
 Igor Stravinsky: Symphony of Psalms

JUNIOR YEAR

Miguel de Cervantes: Don Quixote
 Galileo Galilei: Two New Sciences
 Thomas Hobbes: Leviathan
 René Descartes: Meditations, Rules for the Direction of the Mind
 John Milton: Paradise Lost
 François de La Rochefoucauld: Maximes
 Jean de La Fontaine: Fables
 Blaise Pascal: Pensées
 Christiaan Huygens: Treatise on Light, On the Movement of Bodies by Impact
 George Eliot: Middlemarch
 Baruch Spinoza: Theologico-Political Treatise
 John Locke: Second Treatise of Government
 Jean Racine: Phèdre
 Isaac Newton: Principia Mathematica
 Johannes Kepler: Epitome IV
 Gottfried Leibniz: Monadology, Discourse on Metaphysics, Essay on Dynamics, Philosophical Essays, Principles of Nature and Grace
 Jonathan Swift: Gulliver's Travels
 David Hume: Treatise of Human Nature
 Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Social Contract, The Origin of Inequality
 Molière: Le Misanthrope
 Adam Smith: Wealth of Nations
 Immanuel Kant: Critique of Pure Reason, Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals
 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Don Giovanni
 Jane Austen: Pride and Prejudice, Emma
 Richard Dedekind: Essay on the Theory of Numbers
 Articles of Confederation

The Declaration of Independence
The Constitution of the United States of America
Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay: The Federalist Papers
Mark Twain: Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
William Wordsworth: The Two-Part Prelude of 1799
Essays by: Thomas Young, Brook Taylor, Leonhard Euler, Daniel Bernoulli, Hans Christian Ørsted, André-Marie Ampère, Michael Faraday, James Clerk Maxwell

SENIOR YEAR

Supreme Court opinions
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: Faust
Charles Darwin: The Origin of Species
Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: Phenomenology of Spirit, "Logic" (from the Encyclopedia)
Nikolai Ivanovich Lobachevsky: Theory of Parallels
Franz Kafka: The Metamorphosis
Plato: Phaedrus
Alexis de Tocqueville: Democracy in America
Documents from American History
Abraham Lincoln: Selected Speeches
Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches
Søren Kierkegaard: Philosophical Fragments, Fear and Trembling
Richard Wagner: Tristan and Isolde
Karl Marx: Capital, Political and Economic Manuscripts of 1844, The German Ideology
Fyodor Dostoevsky: The Brothers Karamazov
Leo Tolstoy: War and Peace
Herman Melville: Benito Cereno
Flannery O'Connor: Selected Stories
Sigmund Freud: Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis
Charles Baudelaire: Les Fleurs du Mal
Booker T. Washington: Selected Writings
W. E. B. Du Bois: The Souls of Black Folk
Edmund Husserl: Crisis of the European Sciences
Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings,
Albert Einstein: Selected Papers
Joseph Conrad: Heart of Darkness
William Faulkner: Go Down Moses
Gustave Flaubert: Un Coeur Simple
Virginia Woolf: Mrs. Dalloway, To The Lighthouse
Poems by: W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, Paul Valéry, Arthur Rimbaud
Essays by: Michael Faraday, J. J. Thomson, Hermann Minkowski, Ernest Rutherford, Clinton Davisson, Erwin Schrödinger, Niels Bohr, James Clerk Maxwell, Louis-Victor de Broglie, Werner Heisenberg, Gregor Mendel, Theodor Boveri, Walter Sutton, Thomas Hunt Morgan, George Wells Beadle & Edward Lawrie Tatum, Gerald Jay Sussman, James D. Watson & Francis Crick, François Jacob & Jacques Monod, G. H. Hardy

Statement of the St. John's Program 2015-2016 (Annapolis, MD: St. John's College, 2017), 20–23.
https://www.sjc.edu/application/files/3014/8478/1768/St_Johns_College_Statement_of_the_Program.pdf
(accessed February 20, 2018).

APPENDIX D

GREAT BOOKS CLASS / ELECTIVE CHAPEL SURVEY

1. Did you have an understanding of / appreciation for the Great Books format when you began attending this class/elective chapel?

Not really Only a little Yes

2. I have an understanding of / appreciation for the Great Books format after attending this class/elective chapel?

Not really Only a little Yes

3. I see this class/elective chapel as an opportunity to be more personally involved in class discussion and/or learning?

Not really Only a little Somewhat Definitely

4. I was able to learn something that I may not have learned in a traditionally-taught class.

Not at all Less Somewhat Less Neutral Somewhat more More Much more

5. I have gained a deeper understanding of the class reading materials.

Not at all Less Somewhat Less Neutral Somewhat more More Much more

6. I was able to contribute in a meaningful way.

Not at all Less Somewhat Less Neutral Somewhat more More Much more

7. Questions play a significant role in encouraging meaningful conversation.

Not at all Less Somewhat Less Neutral Somewhat more More Much more

8. I was inspired to do further discussion, reading and/or research outside of class.

Not at all Less Somewhat Less Neutral Somewhat more More Much more

9. I was able to complete the required reading.

Not at all Less Somewhat Less Neutral Somewhat more More Much more

10. My interest level changed in regards to the material due to the different style of teaching/learning.

Not at all Less Somewhat Less Neutral Somewhat more More Much more

11. Please indicate how many class meetings / elective chapels you were able to attend:

Very few Less than half Half More than half Most All

12. Where did you hear about this class/elective chapel?

Student recommendation Email Announcement Class Catalog Other: _____

13. What interested you most about attending this class/elective chapel? (check all that apply)

Format Teacher New Experience Text Opportunity to Learn Other: _____

14. I would be likely to attend another class/elective chapel based on the Great Books format.

Not at all Less Somewhat Less Neutral Somewhat more More Much more

15. I feel that this class/elective chapel has added significantly to my educational experience at VFCC.

Not at all Less Somewhat Less Neutral Somewhat more More Much more

16. I would recommend this Great Books class/elective chapel to other students.

Not at all Less Somewhat Less Neutral Somewhat more More Much more

17. Students who would benefit most from this Great Books class/elective chapel are:

Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior All None

18. I would like to receive information about future Great Books classes/elective chapels.

☐ Yes, sign me up - I loved it. ☐ No, I have had enough. ☐ Maybe. ☐ I'm graduating.

Statements:

19. I experienced greater motivation to read the material assigned in this Great Books class/elective chapel compared to traditionally-taught classes/chapels.

Not at all Less Somewhat Less Neutral Somewhat more More Much more

20. I did more careful reflection/study for the Great Books class/elective chapel.

Not at all Less Somewhat Less Neutral Somewhat more More Much more

21. I believe that I experienced personal spiritual growth while taking this Great Books class/elective chapel.

Not at all Less Somewhat Less Neutral Somewhat more More Much more

22. I gained insight from my own personal reflection on the reading assignments/discussions that took place in the Great Books class/elective chapel.

Not at all Less Somewhat Less Neutral Somewhat more More Much more

23. My relationships with friends/family/colleagues changed during this Great Books class/elective chapel.

Not at all Less Somewhat Less Neutral Somewhat more More Much more

24. My relationship with God experienced a positive change during this Great Books class/elective chapel.

Not at all Less Somewhat Less Neutral Somewhat more More Much more

25. I am more willing to discuss other points of view after taking this Great Books class/elective chapel.

Not at all Less Somewhat Less Neutral Somewhat more More Much more

26. I thought of additional questions I wanted to ask during the Great Books class/elective chapel.

Not at all Less Somewhat Less Neutral Somewhat more More Much more

27. I have an improved sense of educational purpose after having taken this Great Books class/elective chapel.

Not at all Less Somewhat Less Neutral Somewhat more More Much more

28. I have a greater love for learning after participating in this Great Books class/elective chapel.

Not at all Less Somewhat Less Neutral Somewhat more More Much more

29. I have an increased desire to read/consider reading more challenging materials after having taken this Great Books/elective chapel.

Not at all Less Somewhat Less Neutral Somewhat more More Much more

30. The Great Books class/elective chapel is an asset to the overall VFCC learning experience.

Not at all Less Somewhat Less Neutral Somewhat more More Much more

31. I enjoyed this type of class experience (circle one) more / less / as much as other elective chapel / class formats.

Any additional comments regarding this class are welcome. Email: mhmaclean@vfcc.edu

Name (optional): _____

☐ I give my permission for my comments to be published in your doctoral ministry thesis.

APPENDIX E

ADDITIONAL QUESTION PROMPTS

This Appendix consists of the additional question prompts utilized with students. The scope of this project does not allow for each student response or discussion to be recorded and analyzed. Many of these questions, however, were employed as prompts for students to prepare for class discussions. These are listed here because they were the significant “tools” to get students thinking and reflecting concerning the topics discussed.

Theology I - Augustine's *Confessions*

Discussion Questions: Book 1

1. One of Augustine's most famous quotes occurs in the opening section of the *Confessions*, “...thou hast made us for thyself and restless is our heart until it comes to rest in thee.” (1.1) What does Augustine mean by this assertion?
2. What do you make of Augustine's discussion in Chapters 2-3 regarding God's presence in all things?
3. Does Augustine believe that the discipline he received at school was a good or bad thing? Why does he feel this way? (Chapters 9-10)
4. How does Augustine feel about his mother's decision to postpone his baptism? (Chapter 11)
5. What did Augustine regard as his strengths as a boy? Despite these “gifts,” where did he go wrong? (Chapter 19)

Discussion Questions: Book 2

1. According to Chapter 3, why did Augustine write these *Confessions*?
2. Why did Augustine view his theft from the pear orchard as such an evil act? (Chapter 4)
3. What, according to Augustine, lies at the heart of all crimes? (Chapter 5)
4. Why does sin turn us away rather than toward God? (Chapter 6)
5. Which did Augustine love more, the sin of theft itself or the fact that others in the company of others? Why do these alternatives become a paradox for Augustine? (Chapters 8, 9)

Discussion Questions: Book 3

1. What is the essential problem with the hunger of lust? (Chapter 1)
2. Why is it dangerous to grieve at tragedies portrayed on stage? (Chapter 2)
3. Why did Augustine view so negatively the teachings of the Manicheans? (Chapter 6)
4. How, generally speaking, does Augustine describe the relationship between divine law and civil law? (Chapters 7, 8)
5. Why does Augustine view his mother to be instrumental in his delivery from Manichean teaching? (Chapter 11)

Discussion Questions: Book 4

1. Why did the death of his friend disturb Augustine so deeply? (Chapter 4)
2. How can the tears of grief be considered both sweet and bitter? (Chapter 5)
3. Why are we better served to love others “in” God? (Chapter 9)
4. How does time complicate love? (Chapter 10)
5. What does Augustine view as the primary error in his earlier views on beauty? (Chapter 15)

Discussion Questions: Book 5

1. What is a practical effect of God's omnipresence? (Chapter 2)
2. Why is it better to know God than to know all things? (Chapter 4)
3. How did God use the time that Augustine spent with Faustus to move him forward in his quest for truth? (Chapter 7)
4. How did the problem of evil create an obstacle to Augustine's acceptance of Catholic Christian doctrine? (Chapter 10)
5. How does Augustine describe his thought process as he left the Manichean church to become a Christian catechumen? What role did the analogy of Scripture play in this transition?(Chapter 14)

Discussion Questions: Book 6

1. What fundamental truth about creation did Augustine learn from Ambrose's preaching at this time? (Chapter 3)
2. How did Augustine's quest for "certainty" form an obstacle in his quest for truth? (Chapter 4)
3. Why does Augustine begin to trust the Scriptures as an authoritative revelation of God? (Chapter 5)
4. What does Augustine learn from the "beggar" he sees in Milan? (Chapter 6)
5. What prevents Augustine from devoting himself to his new quest for truth within the Christian church? (Chapter 11)

Discussion Questions: Book 7

1. How did Augustine view God's omnipresence at this early stage of his Christian development? (Chapter 1)
2. Why does the Manichean view of God's Word do injustice to the incorruptible nature of God? (Chapter 2)
3. Why could Augustine not see the cause of evil to be located entirely in our human will? (Chapter 3)
4. What would Augustine regard as the first premise of his argument regarding the origin of evil? (Chapter 4)
5. What is the relationship between goodness and existence? (Chapter 12)

Discussion Questions: Book 8

1. Why did Augustine view his love of women as an impediment to his faith? (Chapter 1)
2. Why do we humans seem to fluctuate in our feelings of joy? Why is this a paradox for Augustine? (Chapter 3)
3. Why are we justified in rejoicing over celebrated conversions like that of Victorinus? When would such celebrations not be justified? (Chapter 4)
4. Why does Augustine reject the Manichean notion of conflicting human wills within each person? (Chapter 10)
5. What conflicting voices did Augustine hear as he wrestled with his decision of faith in the garden? (Chapter 11)

Discussion Questions: Book 9

1. Why does Augustine now address Christ as the "true and highest Sweetness"? (Chapter 1)
2. How is Augustine consoled in the death of his two friends? (Chapter 3)
3. Why were the Psalms, and Psalm 4 in particular, so instructive for Augustine during this

period? (Chapter 4)

4. How did Augustine feel about his son, Adeodatus? (Chapter 6)

5. What impresses Augustine about his mother's changing thoughts regarding her place of burial? (Chapter 11)

Discussion Questions: Book 10

1. What role does memory play in discovering certain self-evident truths? (Chapter 10)

2. Why might it be possible to remember what we have forgotten? (Chapter 19)

3. Why can Augustine not yet find how God is made present in his memory? (Chapter 25)

4. Why were Augustine's earlier attempts at finding God unsuccessful? (Chapter 27)

5. What danger lies in "the desire to be feared and loved of men"? (Chapter 36)

Discussion Questions: Book 11

1. What is true about heaven and earth, and everything within them? (Chapter 4)

2. In what sense is God's Word eternal? (Chapter 7)

3. Why is there no time before God created heaven and earth? (Chapter 13)

4. In what sense may past or future events be regarded as present? (Chapter 18)

5. What role does the mind play in the measuring of time? (Chapter 27)

Discussion Questions: Book 12

1. Why is it so difficult for us to grasp this concept of unformed matter? (Chapter 5)

2. What causes Augustine to utter this prayer in Chapter 10?

3. How many different interpretations does Augustine list here of the Genesis phrase, "In the beginning God created heaven and earth"? (Chapter 20)

4. In what way does love teach us to regulate our opinions about revealed truth? (Chapter 25)

5. Why is Augustine at peace about this diversity of opinion regarding biblical creation story? (Chapter 30)

Discussion Questions: Book 13

1. What is the "true good of every created thing"? (Chapter 2)

2. How does Augustine see the Trinity in this work of creation? (Chapter 5)

3. How can our own nature, as one who "is, knows and wills" give us some insight into the notion of Trinity? (Chapter 11)

4. Why can we not know God like we know ourselves? (Chapter 16)

5. How does Augustine summarize his views regarding creation 'ex nihilo' (i.e., "from nothing")? (Chapter 33)

Theology II – John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress¹

Discussion Questions: Chapter 1 and 2

1. What does it mean to be a pilgrim? Why do you think the metaphor of pilgrimage is a fitting description of the Christian life?

2. What is Christian's situation at the beginning of this story? What needs to change? What is the hope that is extended to Christian and to others in his situation?

3. How are Obstinate and Pliable different from each other? In what ways are they alike?

1. These questions were adapted from *The Pilgrim's Progress – A Guided Tour Study Guide* by Derek Thomas, (Ligonier, PA: Ligonier Ministries, 2013).

4. Where did the Slough of Despond come from, and why could it not be fixed? In what ways do Christians experience the Slough of Despond today? What has God given His people to help them through the slough?
5. How have you noticed God's sovereignty at work in Christian's life?

Discussion Questions: Chapter 3 and 4

1. Why doesn't Mr. Worldly Wiseman like the fact that Christian was reading the Bible? Explain.
2. Read Heb. 10:38 – How does this verse fit with Christian trying to remove his burden with morality and the law. Do you ever find yourself trying to find relief for the conviction of sin in trying to be moral rather than laying it all on Christ? What do you do in those times?
3. Why is Worldly Wiseman a false teacher? Evangelist gives Christian three reasons to abhor him. What are they and do they still apply to false teachers today?
4. Christian runs to the wicket gate and knocks more than once or twice, what do the running and the knocking teach us?
5. Goodwill pulls Christian through the gate. Why does he do this, and what do these dangers represent? Christian goes through the wicket gate and enters the narrow path? This is sometimes seen as the moment of his salvation, but he still has his burden on his back. What do you think about this?

Discussion Questions: Chapter 5 and 6

1. Who does the Interpreter represent? Some say he represents the Holy Spirit in His ministry of illumination and teaching. Others say he represents a minister of the gospel and the different rooms represent various theological truths. Which view is more likely? Another view?
2. How is the heart of man like the dusty room, and what happens when the room is attempted to be cleaned with the broom of the law? What does this teach us about the law?
3. What do Passion and Patience represent in the Christian life, and what do we learn from them? Can you think of any Bible passages that relate to this?
4. Explain the significance of the scene with the fire burning against the wall.
5. The description of the man in the iron cage is one of the most memorable scenes in Pilgrims Progress. What was your reaction when you considered it and what do you think it means?
6. How does Christian lose his burden and how does this relate to his experience at the wicket gate?

Discussion Questions: Chapter 7 and 8

1. What is the significance of the hill known as difficulty? What kinds of hills have you experienced that have challenged you as a Christian?
2. When Christian was climbing Hill Difficulty, he finds a place of refreshment by the Lord for refreshing weary travelers. What does this represent, and what does it mean that he fell asleep there?
3. What does it mean that Christian loses his scroll, and what does it teach us that it took a while before he realized it was gone?
4. What is the role of the chained lions, and what do their chains teach us?
5. What is Christian's reason for wanting to go to Mount Zion? How do these thoughts align with your reason for desiring heaven?
6. What does Christian say is his wife's reason for not following Christian? Do you ever see the same tendency in your own life?

Discussion Questions: Chapter 9 and 10

1. Describe the Valley of the Shadow of Death in Pilgrim's Progress. How might Christians experience this valley in their spiritual lives? How have you experienced the valley?
2. What are some ways that the Devil can launch attacks upon the minds of believers? How can believers withstand these trials of the mind?
3. What words did Faithful utter in the darkness? What can we learn from this?
4. In what ways can the companionship of other Christians help a person to endure the valley? How has God used relationships with other believers to strengthen your faith?
5. What were some of Shame's arguments against faithful, and where do you hear these today?

Discussion Questions: Chapter 11 and 12

1. What does it mean that Talkative was more attractive at a distance than up close? He says many true things, what then is the problem with him? Do you ever have to guard your own heart from being like that?
2. What are some of the ways Faithful says the work of grace is discovered in the life of a person?
3. What does Vanity Fair represent? Why is this place so dangerous for Christians?
4. Sooner or later, each Christian must travel through Vanity Fair. What wares at the fair are most tempting and alluring to you? What might be good about these things, and how can sin corrupt them? How can you best guard your heart against these temptations?
5. Why did the pilgrims experience such opposition from the people of Vanity Fair? In what ways have you faced spiritual opposition from the people around you?

Discussion Questions: Chapter 13 and 14

1. Describe Mr. By-Ends. What prevented him from joining Christian and Hopeful? How does Mr. By-Ends serve as a warning for believers today?
2. How did the pilgrims wander onto the giant's estate? In what way might this situation have been avoided?
3. Why was Christian in double sorrow in the dungeon?
4. What were some of Hopeful's arguments to Christian as to why they should not end their own lives?
5. What does the key represent that unlocked the door to Doubting Castle, and what does it look like in the Christian life?

Discussion Questions: Chapter 15 and 16

1. What were some of the sights the shepherds showed the pilgrims in the Delectable Mountains? What do you think the Delectable Mountains describe? Why or why not is this a good comparison?
2. The names of the shepherds of the Delectable Mountains are Knowledge, Experience, Watchful, and Sincere. Consider these attributes; why is each of these qualities important in a shepherd or leader?
3. Why does Ignorance think he will be accepted at the gate of the celestial city?
4. What is the story of Little-faith, and what do we learn from it?
5. What description does Christian give of Great Grace? Do you consider this an accurate depiction? Why or why not?

Discussion Questions: Chapter 17 and 18

1. Why did Christian and Hopeful not recognize Flatterer, and what does this teach us?
2. What were some of Atheists arguments to Christian and Hopeful?
3. The Enchanted Ground had air that makes pilgrims drowsy, what situations in life have this effect on us?
4. How do the pilgrims keep from falling asleep? What does this look like in the Christian life?
5. What aspects of Hopeful's conversion do you find interesting and/or encouraging?

Discussion Questions: Chapters 19 and 20

1. Interestingly, Bunyan does not end the story with Christian and Hopeful. Instead, he describes a man named Ignorance attempting to enter the Celestial City. What happened to Ignorance? What do you think Bunyan is trying to communicate?
2. Christian and Hopeful responded to the River of Death very differently. Do you more easily identify with Christian or with Hopeful? Explain your answer.
3. As the pilgrims crossed the river, Hopeful's feet could touch the bottom, but Christian's could not. How are we to understand this difference?
4. As you think about your own future death, what thoughts and feelings come to mind? What does it mean to be prepared for death, and how can you prepare yourself for it?

Theology III: Church Fathers²

Bryan Litfin's work provided a contextual chapter review of each Church Father, followed by a selection of primary material either from each Church Father or a close associate.

Chapter 1 Questions: Ignatius of Antioch

1. Read Galatians 5. Issues concerning legalism...What are some issues about which Christians are legalistic? What's the difference between true legalism and maintaining high standards in the church? Why does Paul discuss the fruit of the Spirit in this context?
2. Docetism denies that Jesus came in the flesh, and so makes his work on the cross unimportant. The Gnostics emphasized instead Jesus's role as a teacher of wise sayings. Where do we hear this idea being propagated today?
3. What is the true meaning of the work of Christ? Is this doctrine central or peripheral? What would you be willing to do to defend it?
4. Read Ephesians 2:1-22 and 4:1-6. What is the biblical basis for unity in the body? Why does scripture make unity so important? How is it achieved, practically speaking? Ignatius emphasized that Christian unity must be visible and outward (by being in communion with the bishop). What visible signs in your church reveal your unity? What else could be done to show it?
5. Read Titus 1:5-16. In verse 7 the bishop (or overseer) is called "God's steward" of the church. How do pastors and elders perform this function today? Do you believe you should submit to

2. Bryan Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers: An Evangelical Introduction* (Ada, MI: Brazos Press, 2007). These question prompts are listed at the back of each chapter.

your appointed church leaders? How much authority should pastors be given? If you could achieve Ignatius's vision of harmonious love between the pastor and congregation, what would it look like in your church?

Chapter 2 Questions: Justin Martyr

1. Justin Martyr always tried to reach people with the gospel from a position of common ground. Think about various groups: scientists, business people, secularists, artists, politicians, or the poor. How could Christianity be presented to some of these groups in an appealing way? Might one go too far, and so compromise the Christian message? What are the "connection points" to use? How important is the testimony of a virtuous life (lifestyle evangelism)?

2. Name some popular philosophies widely held today? What should our biblical attitude toward philosophy be in general? See Acts 17:16-34 and Col 2:8.

3. Perhaps the idea of the "spermatic Logos" is foreign to you, but do you believe that (prior to the arrival of Christ) people could be saved apart from exposure to the OT or Jewish faith? If so, how would that occur? See Acts 17:30.

4. In *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin Martyr used the OT as a collection of predictions about Christ. Is the OT really about Jesus or is it about God's work among the Jews? Or can it be both? See Mat 5:17-18; Luke 24:27; and John 5:46.

5. Justin Martyr had a lot to say about demons as did Jesus and the NT writers (Luke 11:14-26; Ephesians 6:10-12). What role do demons play today? Is there a connection between demons and false human philosophies? What are some demonic imitations of Christian truths we might see today? See 1 Tim 4:1-4

Chapter 3 Questions: Irenaeus of Lyons

1. Irenaeus gave wise counsel to Victor concerning theological disagreements. He said that the churches of Rome and Asia Minor should agree to disagree on some practices, while still holding on to the essential Christian doctrines. Which do you tend to favor: theological truth, or unity in the body? Can we have both? See Ephesians 4:1-6; 2Tim 4:1-5.

2. In light of the "Rule of Faith", what do you think are the non-negotiable doctrines of the faith? If you were preparing a short creed, what components would you include?

3. Have you encountered spiritual elitism or spiritual cliques in your church? What are some ways the "spiritual elite" exclude others? Is this through pretense or knowledge?

4. How important is it for orthodox Christians today to "detect and overthrow" heresies like Irenaeus did? In what ways does your pastor guard you against false doctrine? See 1 Timothy 6:3-5; 20-21.

5. Irenaeus's term "recapitulation" meant that the universe was disordered because of Adam's sin is triumphantly put right by the second Adam's perfect obedience (see Romans 5:12-19; Col 1:15-23). Of course, we do not yet live in a perfected world. Nevertheless, what are some concrete ways that Christ's reign as Head of the church should affect our world?

Chapter 4 Questions: Tertullian

1. Tertullian was a man with great gifts, but great personality flaws as well. Have you ever known anyone like that? Do you see such flaws in your own life? How does it affect your ability to serve God? Does God use deeply flawed people to do great things? Give some examples. What is the difference between boldness and harshness?
2. The heretics were always “seeking” new theological ideas, whereas Tertullian wanted to hold on to an already established faith. What are some new theologies hitting the church today? How should we respond to them as we balance new and old ideas? Read Matthew 7:7-12. What kind of “seeking” did Jesus have in mind?
3. Marcion wanted to divorce Christianity from the Old Testament God of the Jews. While Marcionism is no longer around, anti-Semitism still is. In what ways do Christians display anti-Semitic attitudes today? Is your Christian faith rooted in Israel’s history of salvation? Is the God of the Old Testament truly your God? What is Romans 11:1-32 trying to say about this issue?
4. Evangelicals believe scripture is always the inspired Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:20-21). Nevertheless, history reveals that it took time for the church to recognize which books were inspired and canonical. Why do you think God allowed the church to take so long to establish its canon? How can it be possible for such an important issue as the canon to be determined by fallible people over an extended period? What are the implications of this point for understanding how God works through the church?
5. Tertullian believed biblical interpretations had to line up with the Rule of Faith’s summary of the Bible’s message. Do we have any sources today that help us interpret scripture? Can we ever be completely free from traditional understandings of God’s Word? What about our own denominational or theological traditions – should they function as interpretive guides for us?

Chapter 5 Questions: Perpetua

1. Family and parenthood are highly valued among evangelicals today. It often goes unquestioned that our family members should be our highest priority. Do you think this is true from a Christian perspective? Are we too preoccupied with family relations? What did Jesus mean in his hard saying of Matthew 10:37 and Luke 14:26? What would the renunciation of children or parents for the sake of Jesus look like today?
2. Consider the inclusion of women among the heroes of faith as Hebrews 11:11, 31 (and see vv. 35-38 for a description that fits Perpetua’s situation). What have you learned from Perpetua that has affected your understanding of the admirable qualities of a woman’s character?
3. Perpetua received the kind of spiritual blessings described today as “charismatic gifts” or a “word of knowledge.” What is your view on this? Have prophecies and divine visions ceased, or are they still being given? See 1 Corinthians 13:8, but also 14:1 and 2 Corinthians 12:1-4. How is the Holy Spirit’s power manifested in the church today? Do we make enough room for his remarkable and unexpected work in our midst? Do we overemphasize dramatic and direct revelation as proof of his presence? How does scripture serve to reveal God’s truth by the Spirit?

4. The early Christians believed sacrificing to the Roman emperor's "genius" was an act of devotion toward demons. Today we're not urged to worship demonic powers directly. But can you think of any ways we give our deepest affections to people, thing, or ideals other than God? Do we worship the Devil in not-so-obvious ways?

5. Martyrs bear witness to Christ by making the ultimate sacrifice. Is there anything you would be unwilling to sacrifice for the name of Jesus? Is he "Lord" over every part of your life? Is your bold and fearless testimony for him ever compromised by reluctance to let go of something you hold dear? If Perpetua could leave behind all she loved, shouldn't we likewise be willing to give up the things we love? For example, shouldn't we relinquish our reputation or human esteem in order to bear witness to Christ? What is meant by Matthew 10:33; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; and 2 Timothy 2:12?

Chapter 6 Questions: Origen

1. Have you ever read a great book that conveyed truth in a way you hadn't thought of before? Describe a time you learned something profound about God or the world through a written narrative.

2. What do you think of allegory? Can it be applied to scripture? Why or why not? What dangers are present? Which is more necessary to interpret the Bible – your mind or your heart? Assuming we can't employ Origen's type of allegory today, what would it look like to find authentic "spiritual meaning" in a biblical text? Describe a proper method of interpreting the Bible. How do you find God's times truth in the ancient book?

3. If you hunger for the soul of scripture, here is some in-depth study you can do. Read Galatians 4:21-31. Then compare it to Isaiah 54:1, and also Genesis 16:18:9-15; and 21:9-21. How would you characterize the interpretive moves Paul is making in Galatians? How does he take truth from the Old Testament and apply it to Christianity? Now ask the same questions of 1 Corinthians 10:4-6 in comparison with Exodus 17:1-7 and Numbers 20:1-11. What does Paul mean in 1 Corinthians 10:6 when he says, "these things took place as examples us"?

4. Origen lived a rigorous lifestyle of self-denial. In what contexts do we practice self-denial today? In other words, what are our normal motivations for denying our bodily urges? Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. What would it look like to "buffet our body" like Paul did? In what ways have American Christians become self-indulgent or morally lax? How could we practice a higher degree of asceticism than we currently do? At the same time, how can we avoid legalism and spiritual elitism?

5. Origen was a great scholar of the Bible and theology. Are academicians and scholars respected at your church? Is theology emphasized, or rarely mentioned? Do you tend to be suspicious of scholars? Or are you too trusting? Can excessive learning take a person away from the simple gospel? Is simple theology best? Do we honor God if we remain at the simple level?

Chapter 7 Questions: Athanasius

1. Where is the "hole in the dike" today? What cultural forces threaten the church in the twenty-first century? In other words, as you observe the Christian scene, what teachings do you

find most dangerous to the body of believers? What specific things could you do to “put your finger in the hole”?

2. Athanasius staked his life on the doctrine of the Trinity. Is this a doctrine worth defending today? Or is it something about which Christians can disagree? To ask it another way: Does scripture clearly teach it, or is it a matter of personal interpretation? See Genesis 1:26; Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 48:16; Matthew 28:19; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:1-3; 20:28; and 2 Corinthians 13:14. Is the Trinity something you would speak about when witnessing?

3. What if Christ were not viewed as fully divine? Imagine he is a great moral teacher, a man of wisdom, a courageous social reformer – yet not God. What implications would this have on the Christian faith? Have you ever heard anyone say that Jesus was only a man? What would you say in response?

4. When Constantine came to power, church and state became linked together. Think about the good things this brought: persecution ceased; Christian values were added to the law; church leaders had influence with government officials; money was available to be spent on Christian purposes; the person of Jesus was widely discussed among the citizenry. In our own times, what benefits could come from evangelical Christians having political influence and money? Give specific examples. In what ways (if any) is political power a good thing for the church?

5. Now let’s think about some negatives of close church-state relations. In what ways could evangelical Christians be corrupted by having political influence today? Again, give some examples. Having thought about the issues of questions 4 and 5, do you believe Constantine represents a triumph or a fall for the church? (Don’t just take my position on this – what do you really think?) Drawing upon the lessons of history, how would you recommend evangelicals relate to government today?

Chapter 8 Questions: Chrysostom

1. How has reading this chapter changed your view of monasticism? Describe a time you have experienced spiritual refreshment through a retreat from the everyday world. Or imagine you could take one week to be completely alone for the purpose of sacred contemplation. Where would you go? How would you spend your time? Would you fast? In what ways do you think it would be difficult? What temptations might you face? Read Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13. What do you notice in these texts that gives you insight into Jesus’s own experience of spiritual retreat and temptation?

2. In Chapter 6 you encountered Alexandrian biblical interpretation, and now you have read about the Antiochene method. Which one attracts you more? Why? How do you know when a spiritual truth is valid? How do we avoid reading our own ideas into the text of scripture? Consider a sample text such as the Song of Songs (the Alexandrians and Antiochenes both wrote commentaries on this book, but came to very different conclusions about it). What kind of truths does it intend to teach us today?

3. How do you feel about spending large sums of money on architecture or decorations for a church? Assuming we all recognize that the church is the *people*, not the *building*, does that mean the building is therefore irrelevant? In your opinion, when does architectural splendor go

too far? How do you balance practical needs such as serving the poor with the need to make a place of worship visually appealing? Does Matthew 26:6-13 address this issue? In what ways does your church incorporate art into its communal life? Is art a form of worship? Is beauty inherently God-pleasing?

4. Describe a time you have been powerfully affected by a sermon. To what do you attribute the impact it had on your life? Did the sermon spur you to action? Can you think of a word picture a preacher has described so vividly you can still recall it today? What point was the preacher trying to illustrate? In your church, is the sermon the focal point of the service? What kind of “preaching style” does your pastor tend to use? Is your pastor a teacher? An expositor? A colorful storyteller? An orator? What themes are emphasized in your pastor’s sermons? What does your pastor do that grabs your attention and draws you in?

5. Have you experienced the impact of hurtful words? What kind of words were they? Lies? Slander? Gossip? Criticism? Flattery? Harshness? Have you ever hurt someone deeply with your words? What wisdom does James 3:1-12 offer us about the use of words among Christians?

Chapter 9 Questions: Augustine

1. Do you have a story of aimless wandering before you came to Jesus? Compare your experience with Augustine’s. Did you have a sense of spiritual restlessness like him? What did it feel like to be a spiritual seeker? What steps brought you to faith in Christ? Were there strategic people involved? Did you ever have a “garden of Milan” crisis experience?

2. Augustine struggled with temptation universal to all people: sex. In what specific ways does sexual sin offer temptation in our culture today? Why is this an area of such difficult struggle for so many? Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 and 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8. What hints does the scripture offer to help us avoid sexual sin? What have you learned from Augustine about sexuality?

3. Augustine tried to find inner peace through his career. Do you struggle with the same issue? In what ways do you seek significance in the workplace, or in your life’s calling? What is the essential attraction offered by career success? Augustine encountered some key people who had renounced their worldly aspirations for the sake of God. Is there anyone whom you admire in this regard? Assuming that work is inevitable for all of us, what would a biblical perspective on work look like? See Genesis 3:17-19; Proverbs 10:2-5, Ecclesiastes 2:17-26; Ephesians 4:28; Colossians 3:17, 22-25; and 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12. Do any other relevant texts come to your mind?

4. Augustine’s baptism marked a very significant transition in his life. Ancient baptism was a profound, life-altering event. It was accompanied by spiritual and theological preparation, fasting, liturgy, and celebration. Describe your own baptism, if you can. How is baptism practiced in your church? Consider Romans 6:1-11. What theology is baptism supposed to express? How could a church properly express that theology? Can you imagine your church having a baptismal service like the one Augustine experienced? Why or why not?

5. We have called Augustine the “Theologian of Grace.” In contrast, the Pelagians said we don’t need a special work of grace, since we are not born sinners. Where do you see this kind of theology being advocated today? See Romans 3:9-20 and 5:12-19 for biblical perspective. In a

similar way, the Donatists diminished God's grace by excluding all "sinners" from their midst. What can go wrong when we fail to show grace to the broken sinners among us? Does being graceful mean we must coddle sin? What is the right balance here? Share a story about a time you (or someone you know) experienced the grace of God. Was the grace mediated through another believer?

Chapter 10 Questions: Cyril of Alexandria

1. The Council of Chalcedon attempted to balance two important points in theology: the humanity and divinity of Christ. Extreme opinions led to heresy. Each side needed to be moderated by the other to find a mediating viewpoint. Are there other theological issues like this today? Do you see a spectrum of beliefs on certain topics, in which the balanced position in the middle is probably the correct one? Name some of these issues. What are some issues on which no compromise is possible?
2. In what ways do you see the humanity of Christ overemphasized in churches today? Is Jesus's image softened in popular evangelical culture? Is he "watered down" to be a man just like us? What does scripture have to tell us about his manhood? See Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 14:32-42; Philippians 2:5-11; and Hebrews 4:15-16.
3. In contrast, where do you see the deity of Christ being over-emphasized today? Is Jesus ever presented as "remote" from his people? What is the difference between that and a proper appreciation for his awesome glory? See Mark 4:35-41; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 7:26; and Revelation 19:11-16 for some biblical discussions of Christ's majesty. Does 2 Corinthians 8:9 bring together the themes of weakness and glory?
4. Which of the ten church fathers profiled in this book did you like the most? The least? Was there a particular one whose story you identified with in a special way? Why?
5. Before reading this book, what did the term "church fathers" mean to you? What names of people would you have associated with that term? Did you have any of the "misconceptions" listed above? Has your understanding of the early church now changed at all? Name a couple of things you will take away from reading this book.

Life Formation: Holy Bible³

Week One

Read Mark 1:21-34

1. If you had been with Jesus, what activities recounted here would have exhausted you? Which ones would have exhilarated you?
2. What emotions might you have felt after healing Simon's mother-in-law? (Keep in mind that Simon Peter could have been called Jesus' best friend.)

Read Mark 1:35-37

3. Consider your own pattern of sleep after an exhausting day of service. Why do you suppose Jesus did not sleep late the next morning?

3. These question prompts are selections from Jan Johnson's *Spiritual Disciplines Companion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009).

4. Since it was still dark when Jesus left the house, what inconveniences (such as dampness) might he have experienced in getting off to a solitary space? What does this tell you about Jesus' desire to have solitude?
5. Why is it important to stop and reflect with God after hectic times of service? How do you usually debrief or clear your head after such times? (Do you talk to a friend? Take a walk? Engage in vigorous exercise? Go to a movie?)
6. If you had been Jesus, what topics relating to the day before would you have prayed about?
7. What do you find inconvenient or uncomfortable about solitude and silence?

Read Mark 1:38-39

8. How did Jesus respond to being found and interrupted? How do you explain this, especially his statement "That is why I have come"?
9. How does this passage encourage you to understand the helpfulness of time alone with God?
10. What do you think is the difference between solitude and loneliness?

Week Two

Read Psalm 37:1-6.

1. Based on the commands in verse 1, what did the psalmist assume his hearers were going through?
2. The command to "dwell in the land" implies that the hearers expected the worst and planned to run away from the evildoers. What does the psalmist say they should do instead? (v. 3)?
3. If you were to "delight in the Lord," what aspects of God (what God is like, how God acts, evidence of God) would you treasure?
4. Imagine that you know some people who obviously delight in the Lord. Why would it be easier to see goodness (righteousness) in them or to see the justice of their causes (v. 6)?
5. Why would it be easier for a person who is fully committed to God to delight in God, wait on God, and be still before God?

Read Psalm 37:7-11.

6. What are some practical ways you can still yourself before God when you're irked that wickedness seems to be winning?
7. What is the wisdom behind the spiritual adage, "When in doubt, wait"?
8. In what situations do you need to walk away in order to refrain from a display of anger?
9. Many times it seems that those who "possess the land" (RSV) or "inherit the land" (NIV) are the ones who have grabbed it successfully. But what sorts of people does this passage say will actually secure the land?
10. Find the two places in verses 1-11 in which the word enjoy occurs. What attitudes or actions bring on enjoyment?
11. How do you think a person who has learned to wait on God, delight in God, and be still before God would be different from others?
12. Reread Psalm 37:1-11 aloud slowly. Which word or phrase is most meaningful to you? What does that phrase tell you about how you want to connect with God?

Week Three

Read Isaiah 30:15-17.

1. What means of finding salvation and strength does Isaiah recommend?
2. How are these means the opposite of what a panicked person often does?
3. What kinds of things does a person of quietness and trust "put to rest"?

4. What evidence of panic do you see in the lives of the Judeans (vv. 16-17)?
5. Think of a situation that usually rouses panic in you. If you took time to rest and be quiet before God (or habitually did so and therefore your response would come from that), how would you respond differently?

Read Isaiah 30:18-22.

6. What do these verse tell us about how God feels about us, even when we panic?
7. How can the assurance that God loves to show grace and compassion and to bring about justice make us more likely to wait on God?
8. What does Isaiah say would be God's response to the people's cries for help (vv. 19-20)?
9. What specific form of obedience did Isaiah prophesy would occur if Judah heard God as described in verse 21?
10. How can quietness and rest help us hear God?

Week Four

Read 1 Chronicles 14:8-12.

1. What question(s) did David ask of God (v. 10)? What was God's answer?
2. What was David's response to the victory?

Read 1 Chronicles 14:13-17.

3. Pretend for a moment that you are a soldier in this Israelite army and you actually hear God marching in the tops of the balsam trees. How might this have affected you? What different reactions might other soldiers have to this experience?
4. People often expect God to answer yes or no (in this situation, attack or don't attack). How do you respond to this demonstration that God may have a miraculous detail or even a third alternative to offer?
5. Why is it sometimes difficult to follow through and do what God leads you to do?
6. What character traits would be likely to develop in a person who listened to God in prayer as David did?
7. How does the discipline of listening to God in prayer touch on other spiritual disciplines such as solitude and silence? Confession? Submission?
8. If you were to ask God for guidance about a certain dilemma in your life, what would that dilemma be?

Week Five

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

1. What three principles for the inner life are listed in these verses? Which one strikes you as most challenging?
2. What words in this passage describe the minute-by-minute nature of our relationship with God?
3. What further insights about prayer do you find in the following passages?

"We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers" (1 Thessalonians 1:2).

"How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith" (1 Thessalonians 3:9-10).

"Constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times" (Romans 1:9-10).

"For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge edge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (Colossians 1:9).

"And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints" (Ephesians 6:18).

4. What do you say to someone who states that it's impossible and even inappropriate to "be joyful always" and "give thanks in all circumstances"?

5. Look at what is in front of you at this moment. How could you thank God for that thing or person or view?

6. What items in your home or workplace might serve as reminders to "hold on to a constant inner vision" of God?

7. What short, three- or four-word prayers (often called breath prayers) might help you call yourself back to an awareness of God's presence throughout the day? Use these sources if you wish or write your own:

___ words of Jesus ("Into your hands")

___ phrases from the Lord's Prayer ("Your will be done")

___ phrases from the apostle Paul's prayers ("May love abound")

8. How might practicing God's presence help us become more full of love or courage or purity or humility?

9. How might practicing the presence of God make us more eager to pray for longer periods of time and even spend time in silence and solitude with God?

10. In what situations might it help you to practice the presence of God as you walk through them?

Week Six

Read Deuteronomy 6:1-2.

1. If the Israelites observed the commands of Scripture, what two results would follow?

2. How do these results challenge the common idea that doing what God commands will ruin your life and make it boring (because you'll let the other guy win or you won't get to fool around sexually)?

Read Deuteronomy 6:3.

3. What does the text say would be the results of being "careful to obey" God?

4. How do these first three verses support the idea that God is for us, wanting to produce in us a life that is whole and good in the deepest sense?

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-6.

5. What do the statements in these verses reveal about how we relate late to God (especially compared to cultural ideas of legalism and obligation)?

6. Why would love for God and trust in God's motives make us more eager to learn what God thinks about our human life and the way it works ("these commandments")?

Read Deuteronomy 6:7-9.

7. How might day-to-day conversations about God and what God wants for us (decrees, laws and commands) help parents connect with God as well as their children?
8. What do these verses tell us about letting our life with God permeate all of our ordinary, mundane activities?
9. How do the truths in verses 1-9 help us know that God is looking for more than a righteousness based only on outward behaviors?
10. Second Timothy 3:16 talks about Scripture as being "God-breathed." How would you describe what God is breathing into us through our reading of Scripture?

Week Seven

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3.

1. What remarkable gifts, qualities or actions are named in this passage that people can do but still have no love in them? How is it possible to do such admired, heroic actions without love?

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

2. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 a second time, replacing the words love and it with God. Which of the qualities of God do you admire most, desiring to incorporate them into your life?
3. Close your eyes, and ask God to show you whatever you need to know about yourself in light of this passage. Don't beat yourself up. Stay out of the way, and see what comes to you.
4. What are some common statements about God that make it sound as if God is rude, self-seeking or easily angered?
5. Notice the other activity of love (and of God) listed in verse 5. How could we imitate God in this way and treat ourselves more graciously?
6. What do these verses tell us about the process of self-reflection?
"Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD" (Lamentations 3:40).
"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9).
"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves" (2 Corinthians 13:5).
"So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12).
7. Reflection is about posing questions to oneself. What are some helpful questions to ask when examining yourself?
8. What do you need to believe deeply about God in order to examine your real self and your real motives without beating yourself up?

Week Eight

Read Mark 10:32-37.

1. How did the band of disciples' final approach to Jerusalem lead James and John to make their request (vv. 35, 37)?
2. What roles of power and honor do ordinary people dream about?
3. If Jesus were to ask you, "What do you want me to do for you?" what would be your reply?

Read Mark 10:38-41.

4. What was Jesus referring to when he said, "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" (See Mark 14:36; Romans 6:3-8.)
5. What motivated Jesus' refusal to grant the brothers' request?

6. Why do you think the other ten disciples were upset?

Read Mark 10:42-45.

7. How did the rulers of the Gentiles behave? How did Jesus say his disciples should behave?

8. James and John made their request of Jesus out of a self-absorbed mindset, but the New Testament teaches us to have a community mindset. To make this switch, how do beliefs and desires have to change?

Week Nine

Read Matthew 6:19-21.

1. What reasons does Jesus give for not storing up treasures?

2. What objects or goals often become "treasures on earth" that we "store up"? How do they complicate our lives (v. 19)?

3. How do these treasures get destroyed or stolen, much to our despair?

4. What would it look like to live with God as one's "treasure"?

Read Matthew 6:22-24.

5. Verse 22 in the King James Version reads "if therefore thine eye be single." How are you full of light instead of darkness when the eye of your soul has a "single" focus?

6. Richard Foster notes that "when Jesus said that 'no one can serve two masters,' he did not mean that it was unwise to serve two masters, but that it was impossible." When we try to do this anyway, what miserable results do we experience?

7. What inner motives drive us to serve so-called earthly treasures while we are trying to serve God?

Read Matthew 6:33.

8. What does "all these things" seem to refer to?

9. How do we get distracted from primary characteristics of Christians: seeking God, being conduits of God's grace?

10. Simplicity can be defined as "being clear and uncomplicated." How is God calling you to be clear and uncomplicated?

Week Ten

Read Philippians 4:4-9.

1. What does rejoicing look like when it's part of worship and celebration?

2. The word translated gentleness in verse 5 (or moderation, KJV) encompasses passes the ideas of surrender and yielded-ness. How can worship develop yielded-ness in a person?

3. The phrase "The Lord is near" seems to be intentionally ambiguous, referring either to God's closeness to us or to the near return of Jesus (v. 5). Why would either meaning be an important assumption in worship and celebration?

4. Celebration involves recollecting what God has done. How does that mitigate worry and anxiety?

5. How is this unexplainable "peace of God" different from "having peaceful feelings"?

6. How is worshiping God different from having worshipful feelings?

7. How is the process described in verse 8 likely to lead to worship and likely to flow from worship? During what in-between moments in life would it help you to focus on "excellent or praiseworthy" things? While driving? Doing yard work? Waiting in a doctor's office?

8. Think of a worship song that includes these two elements: (1) God being worshiped and praised, and (2) a person growing in character. Read Philippians 4:10-13.
9. Monetary gifts are not always given and received with God-honoring attitudes. What words or phrases in verses 10-12 tell us that Paul and the Philippians had attitudes of giving God the glory about the monetary gift the Philippians sent him?
10. If you give money as an act of worship, you are responding to God. What helps people give in a mindset of worship?

First Year Experience – Plato’s Republic

Book One:

1. Does taking offense to questions directly correlate to taking offense to knowledge?
2. Is it possible that the more you discuss a topic the less sense you make of it? What kind of enlightenment may be obtained by admitting what we do not know?

Book Two:

1. What is the best course of action for one to successfully encode accurate information, and not fall a prey to lies disguised as truths? When answering this question, take into consideration the several mediums in which we intake information.
2. Why injustice is preferred over justice. Thinking beyond “because you can do whatever you want,” how is the argument framed that advocates for injustice being profitable to mankind?

Book Three:

1. Considering the kind of community that is trying to be developed, why is such a lie necessary?
2. Imagine that you are part of this community, how would believing that everyone is your brother shape your view of yourself and others? What implication would we see in our country if such a lie became the reality?
3. What confounding variables might arise when trying to base a community on this noble lie?

Book Four:

1. What significance does happiness carry when discussing the effectiveness of an individual? Are we more capable when we are happy?
2. When appointed to a status of responsibility, how can the burden of responsibility impact happiness? Are titles burdensome?
3. Is there a correlation or causation between working toward making others happy and a decline in personal happiness? That is to say “I am less happy, but I am making others happy.”

Book Five:

1. In what way does eliminating the household family make an individual more loyal to the State as a whole?
2. Considering the fact that the household family would be completely removed, is there any downside to eradicating this ideal?

Book Six:

1. In what way might education, think about the public school education system, corrupt the knowledge of children? When answering, think back to our discussion of knowledge and opinion.

2. Do preconceived notions often cloud our judgments in regards to the character and quality of individuals? In what way might pride make it difficult to overcome predetermined opinions?

Book Seven:

1. How are the analogies of the divided line and the cave synonymous?
2. How does one explain the process necessary for getting out of the cave?

Book Eight:

1. Is the idea that our opinions of people are painted by those close to us an accurate notion, or false in logic? Explain.
2. The concept that a child will grow up trying to be the upset of a parent they hold ill feelings toward is a common one. Is such a task easily achieved?

Book Nine:

1. Here we see the soundness of democracy clearly being challenged. Draw out the issues presented regarding democracy and then discuss further ramifications prompted by such drawbacks.
2. If each person, no matter how good, possesses a lawless nature, is there any way to avoid or subdue the evil that comes with such nature? Explain.

Book Ten:

1. Here poetry is referencing any kind of storytelling. Do you believe that poetry has the potential to overshadow the truth? What role does poetry play in society?
2. As more generations unfold, what societal impacts would come from individuals who know very little on a matter presenting works as if they have greater understanding?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adler, Mortimer Jerome, and Charles Lincoln Van Doren. *How to Read a Book*. New York: Touchstone Books, 2014.
- Alexander, Patrick H., et al., eds. *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999.
- Allott, Philip. "On First Understanding Plato's Republic." *European Journal of International Law*, vol. 22, issue 4 (November 1, 2011), 1165–1173. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ejil/chr085> (accessed November 1, 2017).
- Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Matthew 14-28*. In *WORDsearch Bible Software*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2005.
- Arnett, Jeffrey Jenson. *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Augustine. *The Confessions*. Edited by Maria Boulding, and John E. Rotelle. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997.
- Augustine. *The Confessions*. Translated by R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin, 1961).
- Bailey, Sarah Pulliam. "C.S. Lewis Still Inspires 50 Years After His Death." *Religion News Service* (November 22, 2013). https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/22/cs-lewis-50-year-death_n_4325358.html (accessed October 15, 2017).
- Beam, Alex. *A Great Idea at the Time: the Rise, Fall, and Curious Afterlife of the Great Books*. New York: Public Affairs, 2008.
- Bloom, Allan David. *The Closing of the American Mind*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987.
- Bloom, Harold. *The Western Canon: the Books and School of the Ages*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1994.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3*. Edited by Douglas Stephen Bax. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004.
- . *Life Together*. New York: Harper & Row, 1954.

- Bunyan, John. *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Edited by L. Edward Hazelbaker. Gainesville, FL: Bridge Logos, 1998.
- Calvin, John. *Commentary on Genesis*. Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin College Computer Science Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2005.
<https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01.ix.i.html> and
<https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01.xxiv.i.html> (accessed Dec 17, 2017).
- . *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Westminster: John Knox Press, 1974.
- Calvino, Italo. "Why Read the Classics?" *New York Review of Books*. Translated by Patrick Creagh (October 9, 1986). www.nybooks.com/articles/1986/10/09/why-read-the-classics/ (accessed July 20, 2017).
- Carson, D.A., Tremper Longman and David E. Garland. *Matthew. The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 8*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984.
- Childs, Brevard. *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*. Westminster, 1974.
- Chrysostom, John. *Homilies on Genesis, 1–17*. In *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 74, edited by Robert C. Hall. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1986.
- Cowan, Louise, and Os Guinness. *Invitation to the Classics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000.
- Daigle-Williamson, Marsha. *Reflecting the Eternal: Dante's Divine Comedy in the Novels of C.S. Lewis*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2015.
- Dante Alighieri. *Divine Comedy*. Translated by James Finn Cotter. No date,
<http://www.italianstudies.org/comedy/index.htm> (accessed September 19, 2016).
- . *The Divine Comedy*. Translated by Robin Kirkpatrick. New York: Penguin Books, 2013.
- . *The New Life (La Vita Nuova)*. Translated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. London: Ellis and Elvey, 1899, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/41085/41085-h/41085-h.htm> (accessed January 20, 2019).

- Dante's Inferno from the Divine Comedy*. Translated by Benedict Flynn. Naxos Audio Books (audio book), 2004.
- Denby, David. *Great Books: My Adventures with Homer, Rousseau, Woolf, and Other Indestructible Writers of the Western World*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997.
- Dodaro, Robert, and George Lawless. *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner*. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2004.
- Eliot, Charles W. "The Harvard Classics" and "The Shelf of Fiction." (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1909-1917): <http://www.bartleby.com/hc/> (accessed December 8, 2016).
- Everett-Haynes, La Monica. "Why Dante's 'Inferno' Stays Relevant After 700 Years." *Futurity* (November 17, 2016). <http://www.futurity.org/dante-divine-comedy-hell-1299902-2/> (accessed October 16, 2017).
- Ford, Cheryl. Preface to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, by John Bunyan. Translated by Cheryl V. Ford. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1991.
- Forrest, James F. "The Pilgrim's Progress: A Dream That Endures." *Christian History-Learn the History of Christianity & the Church*. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-11/pilgrims-progress-dream-that-endures.html> (accessed October 10, 2017).
- Gardner, Edmund. "Dante Alighieri," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908.
- Geisler, Norman. "Investigating the Bible's Influence," *Focus Press* (October 23, 2017). <https://www.focuspress.org/2017/10/23/investigating-bibles-influence/> (accessed November 10, 2017).
- . *Systematic Theology, Volume Three: Sin, Salvation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Bethany House Publishers, 2004.
- Hanson, Victor Davis, and John Heath. *Who Killed Homer?: The Demise of Classical Education and the Recovery of Greek Wisdom*. New York: Encounter Books, 2001.
- Howell, Brian. *God's White Flag: Interpreting an Anthropomorphic Metaphor in Genesis 32*. *Southeastern Theological Review* 1, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 29-46. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58485b63440243698143794a/t/58a219a>

d5016e1e703251e11/1487018414225/STR_1_1_Howell.pdf (accessed February 14, 2019).

Hunt, Patrick. *The Inferno, by Dante (Critical Insights)*. Hackensack, NJ: Salem Press, 2011.

Hutchins, Robert Maynard. *The Great Conversation*. Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1977. blogs.britannica.com/wp-content/pdf/The_Great_Conversation.pdf (accessed July 20, 2017).

Johnson, Jan. *Spiritual Disciplines Companion: Bible Studies and Practices to Transform Your Soul*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009.

Kidner, Derek. *Genesis: in Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*. Chicago, IL: Tyndale Press, 1967.

Kienitz, Gail. "Augustine: The Confessions." In *Invitation to the Classics*, Edited by Louise Cowan and Os Guinness, 81-84. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998.

Kreeft, Peter. "On Saint Thomas." Introduction to *A Summa of the Summa the Essential Philosophical Passages of St. Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologica*. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1990.

Kreeft, Peter. "The Influence of Saint Augustine." In *The Great Books Reader: Excerpts and Essays on the Most Influential Books in Western Civilization*, Edited by John Mark Reynolds. 121-123. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2011.

Krupat, Arnold. *The Voice in the Margin: Native American Literature and the Canon*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1989.

Lewis, C.S. Introduction to *On the Incarnation: De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*, by Athanasius. New Ed. New York: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1996.

———. *The Screwtape Letters*. London: Fount Paperbacks, 1985.

Lifitin, Bryan. *Getting to Know the Church Fathers: An Evangelical Introduction*. Ada, MI: Brazos Press, 2007.

MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Matthew 16-23*. Austin, TX: Wordsearch Bible Software, 2015.

McCrum, Robert. "The 100 best novels: No 1 – The Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan"

- (1678). *The Guardian* (September 23, 2013).
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/sep/23/100-best-novels-pilgrims-progress> (accessed October 05, 2017).
- McPherran, Mark L. ed. *Plato's 'Republic': A Critical Guide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Montemaggi, Vittorio and Matthew Treherne, editors. *Dante's Commedia: Theology as Poetry*, Notre Dame, ID: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010.
- Murray, Michele C. and Robert J. Nash. *Helping College Students Find Purpose: The Campus Guide to Meaning-Making*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009.
- O' Connor, Flannery. *The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1988.
- Pelikan, Jaroslav. *Whose Bible Is It?: A Short History of the Scriptures*. New York: Penguin, 2005.
- Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Ryken, Leland. *Realms of Gold: the Classics in Christian Perspective*. Chicago: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1991.
- Sayers, Dorothy. "The Lost Tools of Learning," in *Great Books Tutorials.org*.
<http://www.gbt.org/text/sayers.html> (accessed December 14, 2017).
- Setran, David P., and Charis Kiesling. *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood: A Practical Theology for College and Young Adult Ministry*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013.
- Smith, Christian and Patricia Snell. *Souls in Transition: The Religious & Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Stanley Rosen. *Plato's Republic: A Study*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005.
- Sproul, R.C. "The Weight of Glory: The Significance of C.S. Lewis" *Tabletalk Magazine* (January 1, 2008). <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/weight-glory/> (accessed October 10, 2017).

Theroux, David J. "Why C.S. Lewis Is as Influential as Ever." *Independent Institute* (August 3, 2015). <http://www.independent.org/issues/article.asp?id=7468> (accessed November 16, 2017).

Thomas, Derek. *The Pilgrim's Progress – A Guided Tour Study Guide*. Ligonier, PA: Ligonier Ministries, 2013).

Tozer, A.W. *The Knowledge of the Holy*. New York: Harper Collins, 1961.

Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. Revised by Wayne C. Booth, et al. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007.

Turner, David. *Matthew*. In *Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2008.

Van Doren, John. "The Beginnings of the Great Books Movement at Columbia." *Living Legacies*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.

Walters, Sabrina. "Great Books Won Adler Fame, Scorn." *Chicago Sun-Times*, 1 July 2001. www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-4603568.html?refid=easy_hf (accessed July 20, 2017).

Warfield, Benjamin Breckinridge. *Calvin and Augustine*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988.

VITA

MARK HOWARD MACLEAN

May 11, 1965

Groton, MA

EDUCATION

Doctor of Ministry, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary **May 2012 – May 2019**
Expected Graduation Date: May 11, 2019

Master of Arts in Liberal Arts, St. John's College **January 2002**

Master of Divinity, Princeton Theological Seminary **May 1997**

Bachelor of Science in Bible, University of Valley Forge **May 1994**

15 YEARS PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE: 2004-2019

Faculty Member - Ministry, Leadership, and Theology Department and Arts and Sciences Department at the University of Valley Forge 2004-2019.

Courses taught: Introduction to Biblical Interpretation, Biblical Theology, Foundations of Christian Thought, Great Books, Theology of C.S. Lewis, Novel Conversion, Biblical Literature and its Contemporaries, Modern and Postmodern Novels, Major Author Studies, Victorian Novels, Shakespeare and His Contemporaries, Travel Seminar, New Testament Survey, Old Testament Survey, General Epistles, Life Formation, Worldviews, Traditions of Spirituality, Foundations of Biblical Preaching, Advanced Biblical Preaching, Missional Ministry, Pastoral Ministry and Practice, Theo I, Theo II, Theo III, Thinking Theologically, Intro to Christian Belief, Intro to AG Doctrine and History, Spirituality and Philosophical Thought, First Year Experience

24 YEARS PASTORAL MINISTRY: 1995-2019

Worship Church, Ewing, NJ 2014-2019: Teaching & Discipleship Pastor, Campus Pastor

Actively involved in preaching, teaching, and training followers of Christ in a multi-campus setting. Initiated church wide discipleship system and small group ministries. Part of the executive team that established eight churches in five years as a new church plant.

Harvest Chapel, Lawrenceville, NJ 2009-2014: Teaching Pastor

Maintained an active teaching and preaching ministry in a congregational setting.

Heritage Christian Center, East Windsor, NJ 2003-2009: Church Planter

Actively involved in all facets of starting and sustaining a new church.

Nassau Christian Center, Princeton, NJ 1995-2003: Associate Pastor

Assisted Senior Pastor with teaching, preaching, and all other aspects of pastoral ministry.

Directed Christian Education program. Coordinated a comprehensive training program with the primary goals of educating, discipling and equipping lay leaders for visionary ministry.

AFFILIATION

Assemblies of God: License to Preach, 1996-99; Ordained, 1999-present